Newtown or Ninevah?
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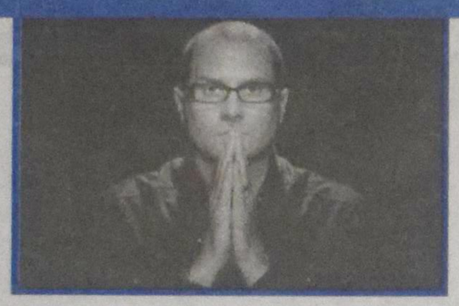

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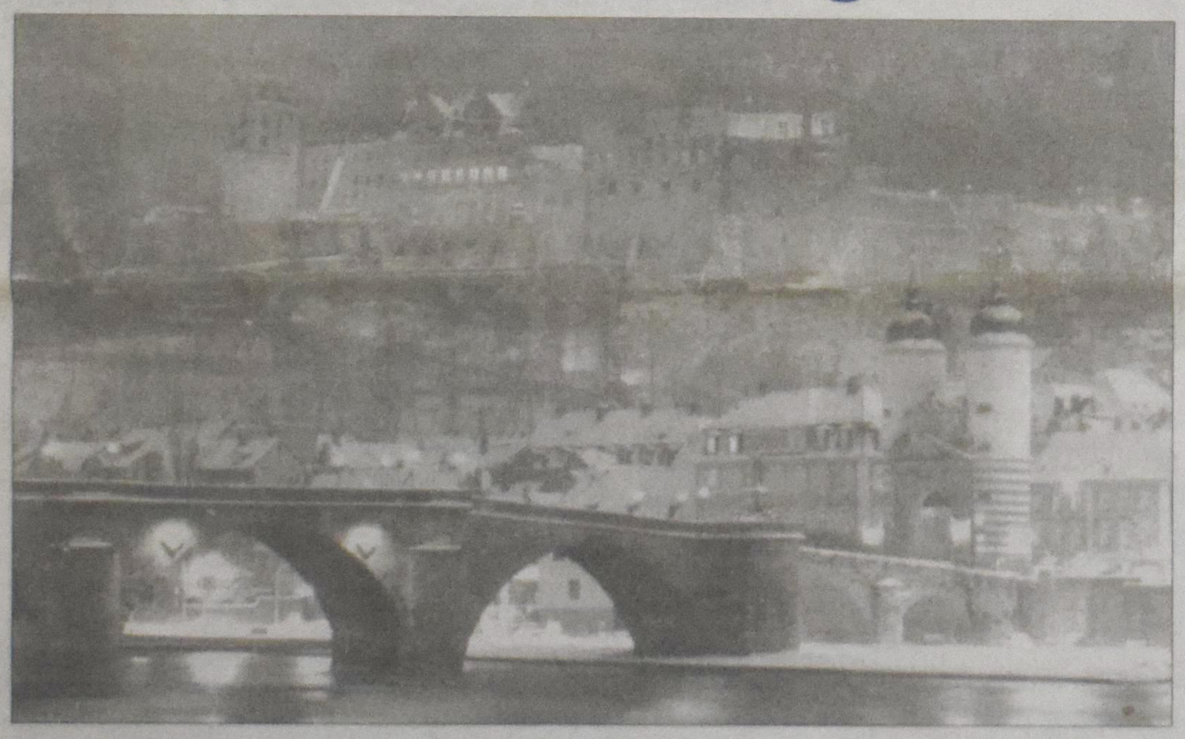
CHRISTIAN COURIER

A well-aged anchor of our faith: Happy 450, Heidelberg



Does the Reformed community still value an ancient text from the German town of Heidelberg?

In the first ever rap song about the Heidelberg Catechism, Curtis Allen (aka the Voice) describes the text as, "Better than you think, not as bad as you remember."

Yeah, I'm on a mission like a couple spies,
and that guys is the reason why I catechize.
The good news we almost forgot I recognize,
Heidelberg rediscovering the gospel prize.

On January 19, 2013, the Heidelberg Catechism (HC) will celebrate its 450th anniversary. It was a team project from the start, and in that spirit *Christian Courier* has gathered a host of well-known Christians to help us mark this milestone.

Do pastors use the Catechism in their sermons? Our survey on p. 11 offers some candid responses. Wayne Brouwer, professor at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, gives some cogent reasons why they should if they don't (p.10). Page 12 has the historical scoop on the men who wrote the catechism and why.

But we begin with this question: Do we still value the Catechism in the Christian Reformed community? The Heidelberg is a landmark of the Reformation – a major Protestant confession that is in everyday use by more than 20 million people worldwide. Yet is it *The Good News We Almost Forgot,* as Kevin DeYoung suggests in his book of that name?

Christian Courier invited nine pastors, professors and writers to reflect briefly on whether the long-lived Heidelberg Catechism is relevant in 2013. Their thoughts, including aspects of the Catechism they appreciate (or dislike), are on the first three pages and conclude on page 20. We are grateful to all of them for their honesty and insight.

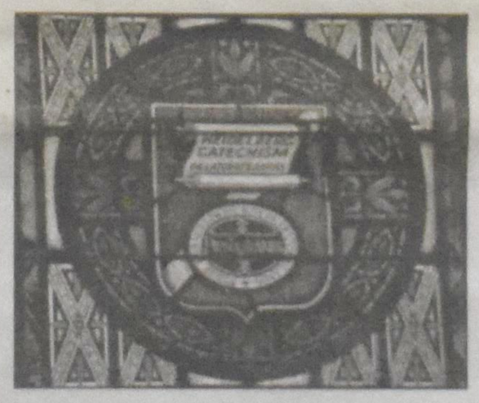
"This is all fact," the Voice raps, "the Heidelberg Cat has been around, but now it seems like it's coming back." As you read these reflections, I hope you're inspired to hunt down your old copy of the HC (it's also free online at **ccel.org**), sift through it and decide for yourself if this 450-year-old text is not as bad as you remember, and maybe even better than you think.

– Angela Reitsma Bick, Editor

My only comfort

Richard Mouw

The late Dutch theologian Hendrikus Berkhof once offered what is for me a memorable comparison of the opening questions and answers of the two great Reformed catechisms, the Heidelberg and the Westminster Shorter. Westminster, Berkhof noted, employs terms that come across as an abstract theological formula from the past: "What is the chief end of man?" The Heidelberg, on the other has a wonderfully contemporary tone of personal authenticity: "What is *your* only comfort in life and in death?"



The HC often returns to questions about the believer's "comfort."

And the Heidelberg maintains that personal-pastoral tone throughout all of its questions and answers, often returning to questions about the believer's "comfort." One of my favourite examples of this is Q&A 52, which deals with the Creed's article on Christ's future Return. Instead of posing a general question about the meaning of this as a doctrine, it addresses the believer directly: "How does Christ's return 'to judge the living and the dead' comfort *you*?"– continuing with an answer that begins with: "In all *my* distress and persecution I turn *my* eyes to the heavens. . . ."

As a committed Kuyperian, I love the scope of Reformed understanding of the cosmic rule of Jesus Christ. All square inches belong to him and we are called to work for the goals of his Kingdom. But I also need to be reminded constantly by the Heidelberg that this conviction, this motivation, must be undergirded by the assurance – the personal *comfort* of knowing – that I belong to the King, a faithful Saviour whom we will someday see face-to-face.

Richard Mouw is President and Professor of Christian Philosophy at the Fuller School of Theology, and the author of many books, including Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport *(2004) and most recently* Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals *(2012).*

You are upheld by God

Rev. Dr. Mary S. Hulst

Pastoral and timeless: those are two words that come to mind when I think about the Heidelberg Catechism.

In my work with students, I hear the same questions from their mouths that Zach and Caspar were thinking of centuries ago: Who am I? Who is God? What do we believe about Jesus? Who is the Holy Spirit? What is God up to in my life? How do I know that God is working? Why do we pray?

These are of course the themes of the catechism: we are fallen, God saves us through Jesus and empowers us by the Holy Spirit,

"God cares," I say again and again. "He will turn your story around."

God upholds – as in, with his hand – heaven and earth and all creatures, and this triune

See **Upheld by God** *on page 2*

News

A blueprint for testimony

Cal Seerveld

When our congregation was without a resident pastor I was asked to teach a Confession Class of four teenage boys to prepare them for Profession of Faith. I decided to go to the horse's mouth and use the Heidelberg Catechism, not some simplified "compendium." Our Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church had received one referral from the 1970 Billy Graham Crusade in Chicago. He joined the group.

It struck me that the CRC lads, who had for years heard Catechism sermons on Sunday evenings, treated the text like prescribed doctrines. Only the Crusade referral fellow caught the personal cachet of the Heidelberg Catechism.

I am not my own . . .
He [Christ] also watches over **me** . . .
Because **I** belong to him, Christ . . .
assures **me** of eternal life . . . .

Later on in Toronto, when instruction in church catechism classes weighed down on our growing children, I said, "Okay, don't worry the details, but learn by heart and tell Mom and me Heidelberg Catechism answers 21, on true faith, 26, on God's providence, and 32, on why you are called a Christian" (along with famous answer 1).

21 True faith is not only knowledge . . . it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in **me** by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace . . . not only others, but **I too**, have had **my** sins forgiven. . . .

27 Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds and so rules . . . that . . . all things, in fact, come to **us** not by chance, but from God's fatherly hand.

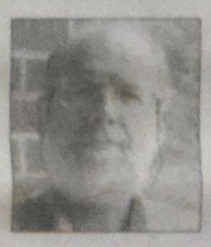
Maybe we need more imaginativity to illustrate the HC's message.

The Heidelberg Catechism needs to be **spoken aloud** and owned to catch the enduring, engaged character of the text, so the answers become a personal testimony of faith, as it was originally conceived, not a recitation of dogmas.

Also, utterly biblical in the Heidelberg Catechism, and deeply formed by the historic Reformation (the faith tradition I treasure), is, for example: (1) that the answer 32 on why I am called a Christian, does not mention "the church"! thereby protecting our believing lives from clericalism, as if only clergy and ecclesiastic office be the hallmark of Christ's anointing me to confess the Rule of Jesus Christ acoming; and (2) the Ten Commandments are exposited in the section on **gratitude** for being saved (Lord's Days 34-44), not in a section on sin, as a punishing stick to make us feel guilty, inducing legalism.

The Heidelberg Catechism I find to be a (neglected) resource of biblical wisdom. Maybe we need more imaginativity today to exposit its truth in dialogical and artistic (quizzical dramatic) ways to witness its solid gospel message and to highlight its very personal, committed trust in Jesus Christ.

Cal Seerveld is Professor Emeritus in Philosophical Aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies, and the author, most recently, of Voicing God's Psalms. *He lives in Toronto.*



Meant for living, not legality

Al Wolters

I belong to a generation which grew up with the Heidelberg Catechism. As a child I was taught the Catechism and heard many excellent sermons on it. There's a lot about this 450-year-old confession that I love and cherish. For example:

1. The Catechism is warmly *personal* and *accessible*. Unlike other confessions, which can sometimes sound rather abstract and theoretical, the Catechism speaks the language of childlike faith, geared to the experience and understanding of the individual believer. Therefore it is also readily accessible. You don't need to be book-smart or educated to be able to understand what it teaches.

2. The Catechism regularly explains biblical teaching in terms of how *useful* it is for the Christian life. For example: "How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?" (Q 28). Doctrine is not there for its own sake, but for how it enables us to grow in faith and live the Christian life.

3. The Catechism is built on three *fundamental texts* of historic Christianity: two from the Bible (the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer) and one from the early church (the Apostle's Creed). It is therefore firmly rooted both in Scripture and ecumenical Christian orthodoxy.

4. The Catechism stresses the importance of God's *law* as a rule for our thanksgiving, not as a pre-condition for our acceptance by God. It also gives an exposition of the Ten Commandments which breathes the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, emphasizing inward disposition rather than legal observance.

The Heidelberger is not without its flaws, and in some ways it shows its age, but I believe that it is fine exposition of biblical teaching which has stood the test of time. On the basics of the gospel it is a relevant today as it was in 1563.

The HC speaks in childlike faith.

Al Wolters is Professor Emeritus of Religion & Theology and Classical Studies at Redeemer University College, and the author of Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview.

Upheld by God *continued*

God invites us to live a life of gratitude. Timeless. I think I say variations on these truths repeatedly through the week as one student or staff member or faculty member after another stops in my office, or sits down for a cup of tea, or looks at me with tears in her eyes because of the inscrutable nature of our God. God cares, I say again and again, he will turn your story around. Jesus died for you, I'll say, and you are forgiven. God is holding you up even when you can't feel it. The Spirit is inviting you to turn from sin and toward a new life. You are anointed.

The words of the catechism spill out of me as I seek to pastor my community well. The gentle, wise, careful words of the catechism were written with new believers in mind, and aren't we all new believers again and again? Aren't we all forming and reforming our ideas about our God and how we love him as life takes its twists and turns?

So I find, years into ministry, that the words of the catechism help this pastor do her work. And they comfort her soul as well. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Dr. Mary S. Hulst is College Chaplain at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. She is also training the next generation of preachers as Assistant Professor of Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Putting faith into focus

Karen DeBoer

When I was a kid I thought catechism was a *place* – a small room in the Chatham Grace CRC basement to which I was carpooled one night a week and where I was taught by the minister from a white book illustrated with line drawings, published by the ministry that now employs me. I don't remember being very interested; I do recall being annoyed because my attendance meant having to miss *Mork and Mindy*. At 14, a show about an alien from the planet Ork seemed more relevant to me than creeds and confessions.

At 14, Mork and Mindy seemed more relevant than creeds and confessions.

Thankfully the words of the catechism orbited around every square inch of life at Grace CRC. It shaped the Sunday sermons, the song selections and the Sunday school curriculum. It was incorporated into worship services during which everyone was invited to stand and say the words of the Apostles Creed – children observing, gradually memorizing and saying the words along with other members of God's family, understanding without really understanding that they were part of something bigger than themselves. And it was in that environment that the catechism shaped my worldview and seeped into my faith without my even realizing it.

As a result, today when my own 14 year old asks, "What do you believe?" I have the words to describe my faith in a Saviour that I belong to both body and soul. The Heidelberg Catechism provides a framework that helps me explain my faith when my own words fail and assures me of God's grace when I falter. In a world where what is relevant today is blurred into irrelevance tomorrow, the ancient words of the catechism help bring the God in whom I put my faith into focus.

Catechism isn't a place, but it's helped me find mine.

Karen DeBoer works as an associate curriculum editor for Faith Alive Resources and attends The Journey, a church plant in Kitchener-Waterloo. She is the author of Home Grown: Handbook for Christian Parenting *and a contributing author of* You're Invited: A Week of Family Devotions on the Lord's Supper.

News

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

Speaking from the heart about Newtown

Right after the Newtown massacre, Christian pundits rushed to make statements about the tragedy.

Mike Huckabee, a Republican former governor and TV personality said this: "We ask why there is violence in our schools, but we have systematically removed God from our schools . . . should we be so surprised that schools would become a place of carnage?"

James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family and radio show host said this: "I think we have turned our back on the Scripture and on God Almighty and I think he has allowed judgment to fall upon us. I think that's what's going on."

And Bryan Fisher, a radio show host and leader of the American Family Association said this: "I think God would say to us, 'Hey, I'll be glad to protect your children, but you've got to invite me back into your world first. I'm not going to go where I'm not wanted. I am a gentleman.'"

Each of these men believe the murder of 20 six-year-old children and six teachers was a judgment from God on America for, among other things, not ordering public schools to start the day in prayer.

They don't really blame the madman who pulled the trigger. No, they say, the real culprits are liberal legislators standing in the way of public school prayer. And, of course, God – who allowed these kids to die to make a political point.

These messages have been shared with me by many friends on Facebook, often with a hearty "Amen" attached to them. But read their words again. Now, imagine a few things with me: First, imagine you are standing with the parents of Dylan Hockley, a first-grader killed in Newtown. Or imagine that he was YOUR child – a beautiful boy born just six years ago, who was learning how to read and who loved Legos and stuffed animals and who was brutally slaughtered along with other little kids in his class. Now, imagine James Dobson approaching you, and saying what he said on the radio to your face.

Second, imagine you are living in present-day England – the most secular place in the Western world. It does not have school prayer. It also does not have school shootings. Now, imagine reading Mike Huckabee's quote. Does it make sense to you? Better yet, imagine yourself in 14th century England – at that time one of the most Christian places on earth – as the Black Death rolls through. Does it make any more sense now?

"We've taken God out of our schools," Huckabee says, "and this is the result." But God doesn't allow kids to die to make a political point.

Third – and this is tough, I realize – put yourself in God's place. Read Bryan Fisher's words again as he talks about God's motives. Note how he says God is neither omnipotent nor omnipresent. Note how certain he is of the link between a lack of government-mandated religious observance and God's wrath. Is this what we believe? Should we really be saying "amen" to all that?

Theology of vengeance

In the days since the shooting, I have been less vexed by the evil of the shooter than I am by the lack of empathy and the theology of vengeance I hear from my fellow Christians. Because while I expect evil in the world, I do not expect to see Christians celebrating it. I am horrified when I hear us gleefully rubbing our hands together and saying: "See? God is finally punishing secular society for turning its back on him!"

We are like Jonah, eager for judgment. But instead of Nineveh we see Newtown. And we project our human motives and lust for punishment onto God. We cherry-pick which things he's upset about, too. Huckabee and the others don't see Newtown as a punishment for too many guns, or too much poverty – but because God is not honoured enough by the government, and because children in all schools are not forced to bend the knee.

When we do this, we are not showing empathy or love. It is the kind of thing we can only say if we cannot put ourselves in the shoes of a grieving, heartbroken, shattered mom or dad. And when non-Christians hear such things, they have every right to ask: "Why would I want to serve a God like that? Why would I want to join his church? Why would I associate with such angry, vengeful people?"

I would hope, instead, that if you or I saw a parent of one of these children today, we would wrap our arms around them, and weep with them. I hope we would resolve to do everything within our power to build a better, safer world. That we would cherish our own children all the more. I think we would.

And yet I suspect we would also join them in their questioning of God and their anger. Because what else is there? When a loved one loses a fight to cancer and dies too young, we ask "why?"

When the holocaust raged across Europe with its unimaginable evil, people asked "why?" When wars come, and accidents and ruin arrive, we ask "why, why, why, oh God?"

So when a tragedy like this strikes, it's natural to ask "why."

I don't know about you, but these tragedies test my faith. They sicken my soul. I cannot explain them. Not only don't I understand the heart of God, I don't even know my own. As scripture tells us, "The human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

So when I hear fellow Christians – so certain about God's motives they feel confident enough to take to the airwaves about it – only two things are possible: Either they are prophets like Jeremiah or Isaiah sent from God to speak his heart to us, or they are speaking from their own deceitful, wicked human hearts.

And when I imagine them, standing before a parent of Newtown, I know exactly whose heart is doing the talking.

Lloyd Rang (lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

The battle is joined

Virginia Miller Lettinga

I met the Heidelberg Catechism in grade seven, with a dozen other teens in a back room with humming florescent lights. In grade eight we received copies of a new, orange-cover catechism book with thought-provoking cartoons by Robin Jensen, but the first year the book was grim, the room was stuffy, and the boy behind me kept kicking my chair as he struggled to find a place to fold up his feet and knees around his chair. When I arrived with the assigned questions and answers memorized, my classmates seemed revolted. And if I fumbled the memorized phrases, the gentle-faced teacher looked disappointed. I spent a miserable year trying to juggle these uneven social expectations and left the class without any sense that I should have interacted with the ideas from the Catechism.

This Durer print shows our "sworn enemies": the world, the flesh and the devil.

The question and answers of Lord's Day 52 first jumped out at me while I was a graduate student working with Durer prints. Lurking in the blotched cross-hatching of an etching of a knight were the enemies he battled: the world, the flesh and the devil. In the Catechism these are "our sworn enemies" and they "never stop attacking us."

Ursinus and the authors of the Catechism justify this set of enemies with texts from the Gospels and Epistles, but the trio of spiritual foes was already recognized by the Desert Fathers. And they are a team that makes sense to 21st century university students. At times we struggle against the surrounding culture. At times we feel that we struggle against the power of evil itself. At times we struggle with our own weak flesh.

"And so, Lord, hold us up and makes us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that in this spiritual war we may not be defeated, but may firmly resist our enemies until we win the final victory."

Virginia Miller Lettinga, together with Neil Lettinga, retired Christian Reformed Chaplain at the University of Northern BC, is currently serving as half of the transitional pastor team for Telkwa CRC.

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Editorials

Thoughtful food aid: Politics, justice and real people

Peter VanderZaag

At times, I become cynical and discouraged when I hear the statistic that almost one billion people will not get enough to eat today, including the 25,000 children who die from hunger or hunger-related diseases each day. I have been involved in International Agriculture for almost 40 years, and still the issue of hunger persists! During that time span, the relative number (percent) of hungry people has decreased substantially, but the absolute number has increased slightly. China is the only country so far to have met and surpassed the Millennium Development goal of reducing poverty by 50 percent by the year 2015. It did so in 2010! As the world's largest populated country, this has dramatically influenced the global statistics. But acute poverty remains, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

VanderZaag in Bangladesh circa 1970, explaining how to plan nutritious vegetables.

The backstory

In the mid-70s, I served as an agriculturalist with World Renew/Mennonite Central Committee in Bangladesh working on crop diversification during the dry season, after monsoon season rice crops. We had great success with promoting dry land crops like wheat, potatoes, vegetables and soybeans. Yet hunger and calamity were everywhere. Often these were caused by environmental (floods) and political (refugees) factors. At one of our retreats we studied the Biblical account of the famine predicted in Egypt and surrounding countries, and the way that Joseph prepared for it by storing grain during the years of abundance. We noted that the grain bins in Canada were full and that there was famine in Bangladesh. This in part catalyzed the inception of what is now known as the Canadian Food Grains Bank (CFGB). We received food aid in Bangladesh from farmers in western Canada to feed the very vulnerable, and implemented a "food for work" program that improved the local infrastructure (roads, dykes, land leveling and so on). From those early days in Bangladesh, the CFGB has grown to be a major organization supported by 15 Christian denominations in Canada.

Food aid today

Food aid following disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes or an unusual drought are cases that I fully support. Here helpless people are provided with basic necessities, including food, for a definite period of time. Think of Haiti after the earthquake.

My difficulty comes with countries like Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Somalia, the Congo and North Korea, which have chronic food shortages due to political issues, corruption and bad policies. Does our food aid merely promote the maintenance of these failed governments? I have personally seen the challenges of no secure land tenure in Ethiopia and the resulting low agricultural productivity. You may recall that when the Queen of Sheba (Ethiopia) visited King Solomon, she brought 4 tonnes of gold as a gift! Ethiopia was a very rich country, but currently it's been dependent on food aid for the last 30 years. I have seen the abject poverty in rural North Korea, where they eat tree bark and whatever else they can find during the lean winter months.

Why help at all?

For 15 years, I've been involved locally with the CFGB through the Loaves and Fishes Growing Project in South Simcoe (south of Barrie). We raise money by growing about 300 acres of crops with cash donations from churches and donations of land, machinery and crop inputs by farmers and Agribusinesses. We raise around $200,000 annually, which we send to the CFGB. This is matched with federal government funds up to 4:1, which provides a million dollars of food aid to poverty pockets of the developing world!

At our last meeting I asked, "Why do you do this? Why do you work so hard and sacrificially to raise money for food aid, even when it goes to these countries with such corrupt governments?" I was struck by the deep personal convictions of each member of our group. Here are some of the responses: "It is as Jesus commanded; it is a Biblical mandate for Christians; we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers; they are real people like us; we have so much; as a mother if I can't feed my children I would feel so awful; maybe someday we will need their help; I was inspired by the faith and deep appreciation of the recipients." Truly the work of the CFGB through the local Christian churches and other partners is being used as a powerful witness to the love and saving power of Jesus Christ in these countries with dysfunctional and corrupt governments!

Leaving the meeting, however, I still felt torn. As much as it is true that we are dealing with real people like you and I, are we not enabling corrupt regimes and ensuring more hardship? I have prayed that these regimes be overthrown. God has not often answered that prayer. I am reminded that if there is no change, it calls us to action and allows a "Christian response to hunger." I do recall when I was in Bangladesh, the current U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger cancelled his trip to Bangladesh, as he considered it a "bottomless bread basket" and that there was no hope. As young energetic idealists, we were determined to prove him wrong. And we did! It took both short term food aid as well as long term Agricultural development to make it happen.

May there continue to be idealists who will work in not only raising the funds, but also in aiding the communities that need it to have food security. It would be my dream that every nation on this planet would have food security for every community. Or will we have to wait until the new heaven and new earth as described in the book of Revelations?

Dr. Peter VanderZaag spent 20 years as an Agricultural Scientist in Asia and Africa. He now farms potatoes near Alliston, Ont. He continues to support International Agricultural Development.

See p.19 for ways we can improve the world's food supply in 2013.

Christian Courier

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Called to be where you are

Angela Reitsma Bick

I had a dream. And it involved chickens.

In July, I met our City Councillor at a neighborhood barbeque.

"Any concerns?" he asked.

"Can you install lights in the catwalk?" I said. He looked pensive.

"Can you petition for a branch of the library in our district?" His brow furrowed.

"Can you get City Council to legalize backyard chickens?" He laughed, forehead clearing, and walked off chuckling. Another crazy.

That's what some of our neighbours thought too, when they peered between fence slats to see Allan, my husband, building a coop last May. Necks stretched even longer to glimpse the actual birds the next week: two Rhode Island browns and a white Sussex – a famously noisy breed (although we didn't know that). The Sussex woke us up that first morning at 5:30 a.m. The incessant clucking drew several neighbours outside; it was so loud you could hear it from several houses away. I checked.

"Are you sure that one's not a rooster?" I asked Allan, slamming our window shut. Nope, just a talkative chicken. A few sleepless hours later, I was ready to call the by-law police on myself.

A week passed; the chickens seemed to be settling in. We had returned the noisy Sussex and with a tarp cover there were no more early morning wake-ups. No eggs yet, though.

I put two grocery store eggs in their nest, having read somewhere that this can trick the chickens into laying again. Unfortunately, I didn't have a chance to tell our five-year-old before she checked the coop herself. She had been the first one hunting for eggs every morning. Grocery eggs in hand, she came racing inside, shouting, "They laid two eggs! It's true! One egg each!" and I had to break her little heart by explaining who put them there. She glared at me for a full 30 minutes, which I suppose is what I deserved for tricking the wrong party. After another week, one chicken finally did lay an egg. For a family with no pets, this is about as exciting as it gets.

The first two authentic eggs.

All was well until one humid day, when the coop seemed to *smell* more than normal. It was hard to tell,

See page 5

Letters

Interested in writing?

Christian Courier is looking for **two new columnists** to contribute one 750-word article each (per month). We would like an emphasis on pop culture, fatherhood, economics or health/medicine but all proposals will be considered. Interested and experienced Canadian writers should send two sample columns to *editor@christiancourier*.ca by March 30, 2013. Content should reflect the principles of God's sovereignty and our mandate to interact with and reform culture. View some of our current columnists at **christiancourier.ca**.

A welcome article on Wierden

Being born and raised in Wierden, I am pleasantly surprised with your article "War Children" (Nov. 12). After being in Canada for 60 years, finally here is someone who is familiar with the Algonquin Regiment and the liberation of Wierden. I vividly remember the Algonquins liberating us.

Wierden was considered a strategic area. Two main highways and two railroads came together from the west and led into Germany. It was a main supply route, east and west, and it was to be defended. The Germans had built strongholds east of Wierden near waterways, bridges and other key places. It took the Algonquins three days to break through the defences with much destruction and loss of life. Somehow the whistling and explosions of their shells was a welcome sound for us, freedom and peace on the way at last. I trust that Cathy and Mark Smith were well received during their visit to Wierden.

I greatly appreciate *Christian Courier*, an independent Christian publication with a vital role in our circle (society). With the younger generation at the helm, it gives me hope and courage, their enthusiasm, ideas and energies making a difference.

Evert Wassink
Forest, Ont.

Is the younger generation going to the dogs?

NO! But they are going to *Christian Courier*. Many of our newer subscribers are younger people. Better yet, a newer generation is conspicuously leading in the production of *CC*.

You might wonder why. Well, it's because *CC* treats a broad spectrum of contemporary issues with deep appreciation for our place and task in the grand Biblical narrative of God's Kingdom. It's inspiring and relevant.

Many more young people could be blessed by *CC*. You may be a reader who has recently subscribed, or one who has loved *CC* for decades. You know how good it is.

If you know a young person between the ages of 16 and 106, consider giving them a subscription to *CC*. Matter of fact, you may know a hundred such young people. We look forward to getting your order for a hundred gift subscriptions – as one CRC church is considering for its members. (We'll give you a very good discount.) There are only a few weeks left in our campaign. Thank you for helping us carry this Kingdom work forward.

– Sylvan Gerritsma
Christian Courier Board member

Called to be where you are *continued*

though, if the pervasive farm odour was entirely our fault.

Neighbourhood watch

"Can you smell our chickens?" I stage-whispered to our one friendly neighbour.

"Your CHICKENS?" she said, loudly enough to make me wince. "No. It's probably that HORSE! You should call the City and complain."

It's true: I had seen it. A family across the street is harbouring a small Shetland pony in their shed, but I was the last person eligible to complain.

As it turns out, that wasn't necessary. That Friday we came home from the park to find a note: *A Member of the Municipal Law Enforcement Section of the City called, regarding a complaint concerning chickens at this address. Please contact Officer Bones.*

After a brief panic attack and family meeting, I followed orders.

"There are currently no chickens at this address," I told the Officer. It was true. They had been returned via cat carrier to the farm not ten minutes earlier.

Big pause on the phone. Officer Bones coughed. "*Were* there chickens at this address?" he asked politely.

That, Sir, is a long story. You might want to sit down.

Years ago, my husband and I used to talk about moving into an intentional community: choosing friends or family to share life with. We still may, someday, but what I didn't realize – foolishly – was that we already live in community, even though we didn't set this one up. Kind of like how you don't get to choose your siblings, but are called to love them just the same.

"We have yet to develop a measurement for any of the things that were important to Jesus, like loving God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and loving our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:28-34)," Rev. Craig Barnes writes. "I would love to pick up a newspaper one morning that reported the percentages of [North] Americans who have turned the other cheek, loved their enemies, fed the hungry, given a cup of water to the thirsty, cared for the sick and visited those in prison (Matt:38-48; 25:31-46). But that is not likely to happen, because our system of measurement is based on values quite foreign to the kingdom of Jesus Christ" (*When God Interrupts,* 71).

I had a dream. And it involved chickens. After all, they are the perfect pet: food source, pest reduction, fertilizer production. I'd even written an editorial about the growing trend of urban poultry in Canadian cities (July 2009). What I hadn't considered was our role in this specific community as ambassadors in Christ's kingdom. We thought, at first, that loving our neighbours would mean giving them free eggs. In the end, it meant letting the chickens go.

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of CC *and lives with her husband and three children in Barrie, Ont.*

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News

Gallup: Americans 77 percent Christian, 0.6 percent Muslim

(CNSNews.com) – America is largely a Christian nation with 77 percent of adults identifying themselves as Christian, according to a recent Gallup survey, while only 0.6 percent identify as Muslim. The survey also found that Mormons were the "most religious" in practicing their faith.

"The United States remains a largely Christian nation; more than nine in 10 Americans who have a religious identity are affiliated with a Christian religion," reported Gallup on Dec. 24. "There has been little change in this portrait of religious identity in the U.S. from last year."

"Mormons remain the most religious group of those measured, while Jews are the least," said Gallup. "Protestants and Muslims continue to be slightly more religious than Catholics."

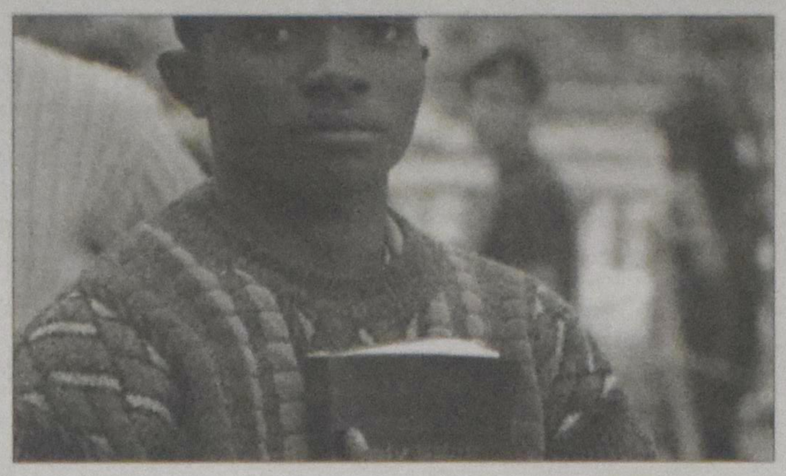
Gallup interviewed more than 326,000 Americans between January and November 2012 and found that 77 percent identified with Christianity in some form: 52 percent Protestant/Other Christian; 23 percent Catholic; and 2 percent Mormon. Another 2 percent identified as Jewish; 0.6 percent identified as Muslim; and 3 percent as "Other/non-Christian."

The number of American adults who said they had no religious identity was up about a half a percentage point over last year, from 15.0 percent to 15.6 percent.

When asked, "Is religion important in your daily life?" Mormons ranked highest, with 87 percent saying "yes." Protestants in general followed with 79 percent saying "yes," and then Muslims, 78 percent "yes," then Catholics, with 70 percent saying "yes." Only 41 percent of Jews said that religion is important in their daily life.

When asked, "How often do you attend religious services?" Mormons again ranked highest, with 81 percent saying they did so "monthly or more often." For Protestants, 64 percent said they attend religious services monthly or more often; 64 percent of Muslims said the same, and 60 percent of Catholics. For Jews, only 34 percent said they attend religious services "monthly or more often."

Three-quarters of American adults self-identify as Christian.



Recent survey depicts the U.S. as a Christian nation.

Temple built in 750 B.C. found in Israel

JERUSALEM (CCO/Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs) – Archeologists have discovered the ruins of a temple built in 750 B.C. at Tel Motza, a site west of Jerusalem.

"The finds recently discovered at Tel Motza provide rare archaeological evidence for the existence of temples and ritual enclosures in the Kingdom of Judah in general, and in the Jerusalem region in particular, prior to the religious reforms throughout the kingdom at the end of the monarchic period (at the time of Hezekiah and Isaiah), which abolished all ritual sites, concentrating ritual practices solely at the Temple in Jerusalem," the site's directors explained.

"The walls of the structure are massive, and it includes a wide, east-facing entrance, conforming to the tradition of temple construction in the ancient Near East: the rays of the sun rising in the east would have illuminated the object placed inside the temple first, symbolizing the divine presence within," Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. "A square structure which was probably an altar was exposed in the temple courtyard, and the cache of sacred vessels was found near the structure."

Parts of the temple structure and a cache of temple vessels were discovered during the excavations that began in the 1990s and have been ongoing in preparation for the building of the new Highway 1 from Sha'ar HaGai to Jerusalem by the National Roads Company (previously the Public Works Department).

Excavations for a highway renovation uncovered these temple ruins west of Jerusalem. A cache of objects was found nearby, including clay figures of domesticated animals.

'Unusual and striking find'

According to Anna Eirikh, Dr. Hamoudi Khalaily and Shua Kisilevitz, directors of the excavation on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, "the ritual building at Tel Motza is an unusual and striking find, in light of the fact that there are hardly any remains of ritual buildings of the period in Judaea at the time of the First Temple. The uniqueness of the structure is even more remarkable because of the vicinity of the site's proximity to the capital city of Jerusalem, which acted as the Kingdom's main sacred center at the time." According to the archaeologists, "among other finds, the site has yielded pottery figurines of men, one of them bearded, whose significance is still unknown."

Tel Motza and the surrounding region are renowned for their prime archaeological importance. Many finds, from a variety of periods, have previously been uncovered at the site. The site's archaeologists previously proposed identifying the site with the biblical settlement of Mozah mentioned in the book of Joshua – a town in the tribal lands of Benjamin, bordering on Judaea (Joshua 18:26). The proposal was based, among other things, on the discovery at the site of a public building, a large structure with storehouses and a considerable number of silos. At the time, archaeologists identified the site as a storehouse, run by high-ranking officials, for Jerusalem's grain supplies.

Besides the remains of the massive temple structure, the assemblage includes ritual pottery vessels, with fragments of chalices, decorated ritual pedestals and a number of pottery figurines of two kinds: the first, small heads in human form with a flat headdress and curling hair; the second, figurines of animals, mainly of harnessed animals.

The archeologists stress that "the find of the sacred structure together with the accompanying cache of sacred vessels, and especially the significant coastal influence evident in the anthropomorphic (human) figurines, still require extensive research."

News

Nigeria: Christians, once again, killed in Christmas services

BORNO STATE, Nigeria (CSW) – Six people were murdered in an assault on a Christmas church service in Borno State, Nigeria, and six more were killed, and two injured, when gunmen attacked a church in a village in Yobe State, during another Christmas service.

According to local sources, the attacks were carried out by gunmen suspected to be members of the Islamist extremist militia Boko Haram. Local news agencies reported that in Borno State, gunmen attacked a Christmas Eve service at the First Baptist Church in the capital city Maiduguri killing six people, including a deacon.

Another attack began during a midnight Christmas Eve service at the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) in Yobe State, where six people were killed, including the church's pastor. The attack continued with a raid during the early hours of Christmas Day on Firi Village, two kilometers north of Potiskum Town.

As the attack was underway, residents, many of whom had fled into the bush, sent text messages stating their homes were being set alight and that the security services were yet to arrive at the scene. Twenty homes and the COCIN church were subsequently razed to the ground.

Since December 2010, Christians in five northern Nigerian states have died in consecutive attacks by Boko Haram on Christmas services. These recent attacks constitute the third consecutive year of such attacks and raise the death toll to over 55 people.

For the third year in a row, terrorists have targeted Christmas church services.

Pope Benedict took note of the attacks in his Christmas message. He prayed for the return of "concord in Nigeria, where savage acts of terrorism continue to reap victims, particularly among Christians."

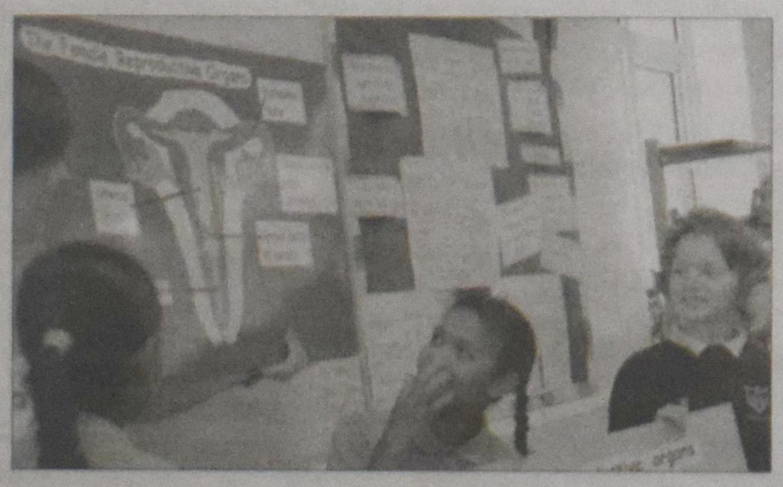
Mervyn Thomas, chief executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a group working for religious freedom "through advocacy and human rights," said, "The courage and commitment of Christians in Yobe, Borno and other northern and central states, who continue to celebrate their faith despite the very real threat of violence, is both inspiring and humbling."

British boys getting their 'sex education' from online porn: MP's report

LONDON (LifeSiteNews.com) – Boys in the U.K. are receiving the bulk of their "sex education" from online porn, a report by a cross-party parliamentary group has warned. This leads young people to have "unprotected" sex without condoms, which in turn leads to unplanned pregnancies, said the report.

The solution offered by MPs is to include mixed-sex "relationship counseling" to current sex education classes.

Porn has "negated the primacy of relationships whilst promoting a self-centered focus of sex," the report said. The British government is also proposing to create automatic prompts for porn filters to be offered by internet service providers.



More sex education happens online than in the classroom, new report warns.

"For teenage girls, there is a lot of pressure on them to have sex, to look sexy and to conform to stereotypes of what the opposite sex sees as attractive, which are often reinforced in these outdoor adverts, music videos and pornography," the report said. Coeducational "relationship" classes would "provide a context where mutual learning and respect between the two sexes can be encouraged, thereby forming a more rounded view of what is involved in a sexual relationship as opposed to just a sexual encounter." Currently, teens are given lessons during sex-ed classes on how to use condoms, but then are "sent off to enjoy themselves."

"Sexual bullying" has been a staple of British news reports for several years. In 2010, a YouGov poll of 788 teenagers from 16 to 18 years old found that almost one-third of girls say they had been subjected to "unwanted sexual touching" at school.

In 2008, the BBC news program "Panorama" quoted a UK anti-bullying and child sexual abuse charity as saying there has been a dramatic rise in the problem in schools. "Certainly over the last four or five years on the Kidscape helpline we used to get maybe one or two calls a year about sexual bullying, but now we are getting two or three calls a week."

The report did not address moral issues related to sex and sex education.

FBI: 20 percent of 2011 hate crimes motivated by 'religious bias'

Marian Van Til, *with files from fbi.gov*

Every year the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) releases a report of the statistics it keeps regarding "hate crimes" – as defined by the Hate Crimes Statistics Act – committed in the country during the previous year.

The U.S. passed its "Hate Crimes Statistics Act" in 1990, signed into law by President George H.W. Bush. It was modified in 2009. The law requires the nation's Attorney General to collect data on crimes committed because of the victim's race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

The hate crimes report for 2011, just released, indicates that 1,944 law enforcement agencies reported 6,222 hate crime incidents involving 7,254 offenses. There were 6,216 "single-bias incidents" that involved 7,240 offenses, 7,697 victims, and 5,724 offenders. The six "multiple-bias incidents" reported in 2011 involved 14 offenses, 16 victims and seven offenders.

Out of roughly the 6,200 single-bias incidents, just under 20 percent were motivated by religious bias. (First on the list, comprising 47 percent of such crimes, were those motivated by racial bias.)

That 20 percent represents 1,318 incidents, as reported by law enforcement agencies. Of those hate crimes, almost two-thirds were anti-Jewish in nature. Following at a great distance were all other religiously motivated crimes: 13 percent were anti-Islamic, 5 percent were anti-Catholic; 5 percent were "anti-multiple religions" and 4 percent were anti-Protestant.

Where the info comes from

The FBI explains, "The Hate Crime Statistics Program of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program collects data regarding criminal offenses that are motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias against a race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity/national origin or disability and are committed against persons, property or society."

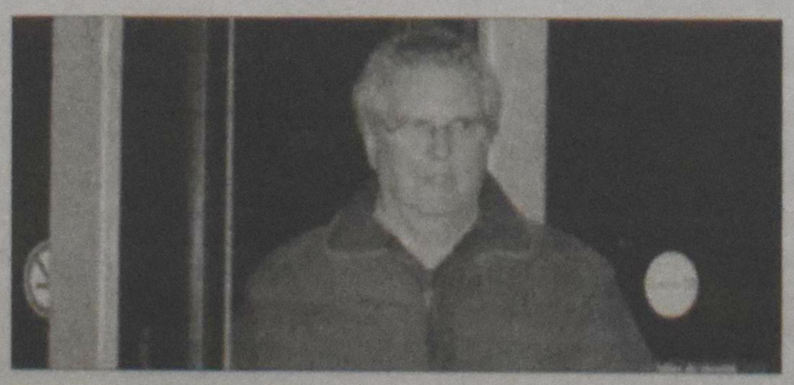
It continues, "The Uniform Crime Reporting Program collects data about both single-bias and multiple-bias hate crimes. For each offense type reported, law enforcement must indicate at least one bias motivation. A single-bias incident is defined as an incident in which one or more offense types are motivated by the same bias. A multiple-bias incident is defined as an incident in which more than one offense type occurs and at least two offense types are motivated by different biases."

There are 11 "offense types" noted: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, aggravated assault, simple assault and intimidation (crimes against persons); robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, arson and destruction/damage/vandalism (crimes against property).

Former spokesman for Canadian bishops arrested on child-porn charges

MONTREAL (CCO) – A former director of communication services of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, has been arrested on charges of making child pornography. Deacon William Kokesch of Montreal was charged with producing and distributing child pornography a day after police announced they had seized 2,000 images of "child porn" from Kokesch's home.

Kokesch and another bishops' conference official were entrusted with coordinating the Canadian presence in the 2005 World Youth Day. In 2002, Kokesch was one of nine Canadians and Americans who drafted a North American pastoral plan for vocations.



Kokesch shortly after his arrest.

Upon learning of Kokesch's arrest, the Archdiocese of Montreal immediately suspended him from ministry. "Child pornography is an affront to human dignity, and our first concern rests with those who are its victims," the archdiocese said in a statement.

"We wish to assure all those concerned by this event that we are keeping them in our prayers, and we urge everyone to have confidence in and respect for the judicial process and to await its conclusions," the statement said.

Columns

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman

Tweeting pellets of wisdom

On December 12, the pope sent his first Twitter message using the Twitter handle @Pontifex. His first message read: "Dear friends, I am pleased to get in touch with you through Twitter. Thank you for your generous response. I bless all of you from my heart." At the time of writing this article, he had already attracted over a billion Twitter followers (see **twitter.com/Pontifex**).

Twitter, which was introduced in 2006, is a service which allows users to post and read text messages of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets." The creator of Twitter, Jack Dorsey, is quoted as saying, "we came across the word 'twitter,' and it was just perfect. The definition was 'a short burst of inconsequential information,' and 'chirps from birds.' And that's exactly what the product was."

Since its launch, Twitter has attracted over 500 million users and handles hundreds of millions of tweets per day. Twitter has become popular with celebrities, who attract large numbers of people interested in reading their random thoughts and comments. Other people use Twitter to broadcast short bursts of information about their day, including what they are eating, doing or thinking at any moment. Consequently, some have suggested that Twitter promotes a type of narcissism as people broadcast the minutiae of their day-to-day lives. Others suggest it is just another way to stay in touch.

Like the pope, should churches start using Twitter? It seems like a good strategy to embrace an electronic forum like Twitter, which can reach many people. But if the "medium is the message," what sort of messages can be embedded in a tweet? A medium limited to 140 characters must necessarily be composed of short and simplistic messages. At best, any deep thoughts will be short-changed as they are tailored to fit within the constraints of the medium. The leader of the Vatican's communications commission recognized this and observed, "Reducing the pope's message to 140 characters is definitely a challenge but we have seen that a profound thought can also be expressed in a brief Biblical passage." He continued, "We can see this as sparks of truth or pellets of wisdom."

Pithy or off-putting?

The character limit of Twitter is similar to those imposed by church signs, which can accommodate only short messages. As a result, the messages that are displayed on church signs must be condensed "pellets of wisdom." Unfortunately, it's hard to do this well: many are simplistic rather than pithy. Signs which read *Will your eternal home be smoking or non-smoking?* and *Forbidden fruit creates many jams* are cheesy and off-putting. Coming up with a fresh message each week that is thoughtful, wise and which fits in the space is difficult.

Will the Pope use Twitter to good effect?

Twitter seems better suited for sending emergency alerts or for broadcasting breaking news. It has been used well to organize protests in places like the Middle East. It can also provide a feedback channel for people to send comments during large events or during live TV shows. In these contexts, Twitter enables short and simple messages to be broadcast quickly to a large audience.

As it is with church signs, so it is with Twitter: some things simply cannot be reduced to 140 characters, while other things that can be said are better not said. Furthermore, because Twitter enables the instant broadcast of messages, users must exercise judgment before posting whatever pops into their minds.

Although it's important for the church to have a presence in culture, we need to be aware that the medium affects the message we wish to give. As Neil Postman once said, you cannot use smoke signals to communicate philosophy, because "its form excludes the content." Likewise, communicating deep and meaningful messages in 140 characters is extremely difficult. Although Twitter can be used to broadcast "pellets of wisdom," like its namesake, it's more often reduced to "burst[s] of inconsequential information."

Derek Schuurman has recently finished writing a book on faith and computer technology titled Shaping a Digital World. *It will be published by InterVarsity Press and released in June 2013.*

Borderless

Brent van Staalduinen

The world's children

Welcome to another New Year. Welcome to another year of killing our children.

Mid December, a cool Friday afternoon. I walk into Jackson Square, unbutton my coat and pull out my phone. The news app blazes red across my screen that a mass shooting in Newtown, Conn., has claimed the life of 26 people. Sandy Hook Elementary School. Six adults. Eight little boys. Twelve little girls. Amidst the swirling current of shoppers I have to step aside and lean against the wall.

Oh, my broken, broken heart.

As I write this two days later, photographs of the murdered children have started to appear on the news. These are cherished pictures, you can tell, brightened by forever-suspended smiles, rosy cheeks and improbably soft hair. The news outlets have been sent short tributes, too, laying loves and joys and favourite foods alongside the names of surviving siblings, most of whom can't understand why their best friends aren't coming home. There are so many good names there, so many loved ones who remain: who will bear the burden of grief more than family?

Unimaginable

Even two days later, trying to imagine a fraction of what those families must be feeling is impossible; I'm stopped cold by it every time. Still, I try because it seems wrong to ignore it. My first thoughts are as a parent-to-be, and I just want to reach for my beautiful, pregnant wife, maybe hold her long enough to count twenty-six of our baby's ineffable kicks and hiccups.

We suffer from violence, distraction and indifference.

But my next thoughts dance between gun control and mass murder, and I seethe at the injustice of every exit wound, every stopped heart, every little person denied the chance to see the end of this new year, every last breath taken far too soon.

If there was a way, I'd like to build a tower higher than Babel and shout southwards with the voice of the Almighty. Thunder his rage at a people who revel in the killing of others and bathe in the rivers of blood their guns produce. Hammer them with the sound of a world weeping and gnashing its teeth at the senselessness of it all. Make them hear the hollowness of their voices as they rail about amendments and rights. Force them to listen to the survivors and then find meaning in the execution of children.

But I probably won't, because the echoes bouncing back across the border might force me to cower and listen, too. Force me to hear that although we didn't pull the trigger, our silence killed those children. Our children. The world's children. We killed them because we haven't spoken the love of our heavenly father clearly enough to be heard amidst the cacophony of a violent, distracted and indifferent world.

Indifference

How indifferent are we? Sandy Hook was the sixteenth mass shooting in the U.S. in 2012 alone so, by the time this goes to print, if another man with too many easily-procured guns mows down another crowd of innocents, we and the statistics won't be shocked. If 400 children can be killed, and another 500 arrested and tortured, as has already happened in Syria's civil war since 2011, who knows how many more will die and suffer in the first two weeks of 2013? How many girls will be mutilated or killed for honour in Muslim countries this New Year? This January, how many child soldiers in Africa will be recruited to die?

Far more than we'll count, care too much about or, tragically, say enough to prevent.

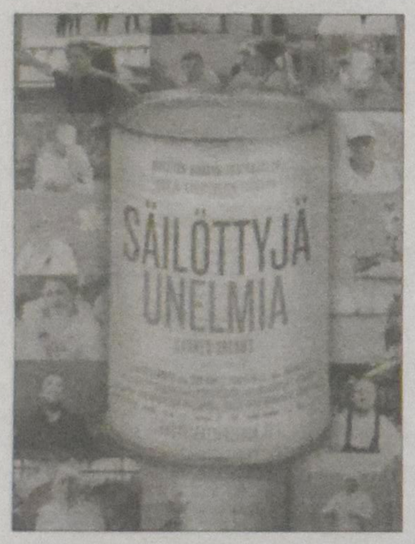
But it's not about the volume; God knows the world is loud enough as it is. The media, that cabal of clanging gongs and clashing cymbals, has already shoved enough microphones and cameras into the faces of traumatized survivors to feed our info-lust for a decade. In response, pastors and celebrities tweet and yell to give Newtown a moment to mourn by stopping the entire machine, as though a moment of silence could stop bullets in their paths. As though one silent moment was possible at all.

Silence is not an answer. When we don't speak out, we arm those who kill, those who would deny our children the peace that is promised them in scripture. Peace will be found amidst the gunfire when we lift our voices, fueled by a strength that only Christ's love can provide. And do it together. I see Christians forming a strong, Texas-style maroon wall of honour surrounding the victims of violence and their communities, where we refuse to keep quiet, weep along with those who have had everything taken away and gnash our teeth at those who would take it.

*Brent (**brentvans.com**) and his wife Rosalee live in the Westdale area of Hamilton.*

Reviews

Plate politics II: *Canned Dreams*



Canned Dreams
Katja Gaurilof, 2012

Ken Dam

In a previous article written for the *Christian Courier* ("Plate Politics," March 12, 2012), I gently prodded readers to consider what it might mean to become "faithful eaters." My purpose was to begin to ask questions about the food we eat on a daily basis. Where did my chicken fingers come from? Who made this delicious frozen pizza for me, and how did they do it? How did all this ravioli goodness come together in this simple, miraculously cheap, bisphenol A (BPA) lined, aluminum-based corrosion resistant tin can?

Well, on the last question, the answer is now easily accessible. Finnish filmmaker Katja Gaurilof, in her 2012 film *Canned Dreams*, takes the viewer on a culinary journey, painstakingly tracing the source of the various ingredients that create the classic symbol of food convenience and comfort – the humble can of ravioli.

The story of ravioli turns out not to be all that humble, nor comforting. Behind each can is a story; a story not only about industrial farming spanning eight countries and thousands of miles, but also about the individual food industry workers, each making ends meet as they go about their daily lives. The film opens with a first-hand account from a middle-aged Brazilian woman, mining for the raw materials to make the aluminum cans in conditions where workplace safety is not even an afterthought. As she is interviewed, the video footage reveals scenes of her daily grind, where a slip of the foot could spell disaster. She tearfully describes how she was forced to give up nine of her twelve children due to her inability to provide for them. The film then journeys to Denmark to visit the lonely disabled pork-farmer as he describes his innate desire for companionship and physical wholeness, while the film backdrop on his hog farm illuminates the reductionistic reality of mechanized, caged, industrial hog-farming operation. The director individually interviews seven other food-industry workers, traveling to Poland (beef farm), Ukraine (wheat), Italy (olive oil), Romania (pork), Portugal (tomatoes), and France (eggs and the Ravioli Canning factory).

High cost of cheap food

The stories told are, for the most part, unremarkable. They are the stories of every human – stories of loss, of love, of revenge and of the search for meaning. The filmmaker focuses on these stories, while offering no commentary on the footage we are seeing at each of the stops. Some of the footage is difficult to watch. The scenes in the beef and pork abattoirs, while gruesome, aren't gratuitous. But the effect of the footage of the blood soaked Polish worker shooting his nail gun into the cow's head, while we eavesdrop on the intimate details of his relationship with his ex-wife, are indeed powerful. While some might view these scenes as intentionally inspiring judgment in the globalized food industry that brings us ravioli, the judgment is not forced. The workers tell their own stories. Only one of the workers, at a pork abattoir in Romania, reflected upon the dissonance within herself created by the work she did. "I believe I have sacrificed over 10 or 15,000 animals so far," she ponders. "The first time I had to kill an animal, I dreamt about it at night. I was dreaming about the blood . . . and it took me three months to get used to it. But my heart still cringes. I hold my breath sometimes and close my eyes, and pray to God that he forgives me. Then you think of your family. Because without this sacrifice, what are you going to put on the table?"

Her question is left unanswered, delicately hanging in the air. If this is the high cost of cheap food, what is the alternative? How do we feed ourselves without making our hearts cringe? In the end, *Canned Dreams* doesn't tell us.

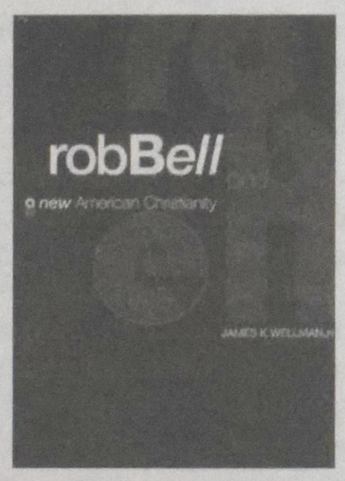
Director Gaurilof traces the origins of every ingredient in ravioli.

The film closes with footage of a grocery store shelf in Finland – the final destination of our humble can. There it stands, insignificant amongst advertising displays of fresh ripened tomatoes. Just you and the can – and the thirty thousand kilometer journey it took to get there.

We are left on our own to consider the source of our food, to wrestle with the implications of a globalized industrial food system. The simple question "how did this can of ravioli get to my plate?" is a meaningful, moral question, imbued with significance. The answer to that question lifts the lid on a whole host of further questions. And therein lies the beauty of *Canned Dreams*. It demands we continue the journey of figuring out what it means to become "faithful eaters."

Ken Dam (tuneintoken@gmail.com) lives, gardens, cooks and brews in Hamilton, Ont. He works as a labour relations specialist with the Christian Labour Association of Canada.

The half-life of a hip Michigan prophet



Rob Bell and a New American Christianity
James K. Wellman, Jr.
Abingdon Press, 2012, 158 p.

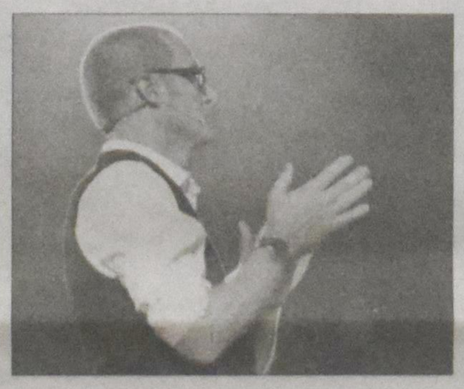
Peter Schuurman

Familiar to evangelicals for his 12-minute Nooma films, hipster preacher Rob Bell was declared by *Time* to be one of the 100 most influential people in the world. His controversial book *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (Harper) hit the New York Times bestseller list the same year. Now University of Washington sociologist James Wellman has penned a short but sharp book examining Bell's still young career.

Wellman argues that Bell's "story and life function as a leading indicator of what it means to be a Christian in the changing modern American religious landscape." What that means develops through the book: a megachurch-led prophetic Christianity with an ambiguous artistic flair stubbornly focused on a "beautiful Jesus."

The book reads fast. Drawing on over ten hours of exclusive interviews with Bell, Wellman jogs through Bell's conservative Republican upbringing and his short rock star career at Wheaton College, then suggests a bout with viral meningitis was pivotal in his decision to go to Fuller Seminary and champion the suffering and sidelined. Bell's subsequent youth ministry at Calvary Chapel in Grand Rapids quickly shifts in 1998 to a church plant nearby that almost overnight became his 10,000 strong Mars Hill community.

Wellman highlights Bell's meteoric rise in evangelical circles – a remarkable feat considering he began his church "preaching Sunday after Sunday on the book of Leviticus." Bell also refused to put signs anywhere around his church building, an abandoned mall they purchased for one dollar.



Evangelical, rock star, artist, prophet.

Central to the book is Wellman's exploration of Bell's charisma. I have been to hear Bell preach; his presence and eloquence are mesmerizing. Wellman elaborates: "His capacity for intimacy with his hearers is related to his ability to articulate the emotional dilemma of those listening and then speak to their concerns with a perspicuity that is jarring, but also with a boldness and certitude that flow from a kind of youthful naiveté." In other words, Bell's preaching performances follow a pattern of burden/release that draws people in and then energizes them for action.

From Mars Hill to Hollywood

From what are people released? Wellman focuses on two clear burden/release scenarios that follow in Bell's writings, which paved the way for Bell's exit from his church and transition to Hollywood. *Jesus Wants to Save Christians* (2008) claims evangelicals have bought into buildings, privilege, war and the myth of American superiority and that a compassionate Jesus can rescue them from such idolatry. *Love Wins* (2011) raised even more evangelical hackles: he parodies penal substitution theory as God having to save us from God – a "cruel, mean, vicious tormentor." If a father were that volatile, says Bell, "we would contact the child protection services immediately." This earned Bell the severe labels of heretic and universalist, and the accusation of creating a "different God" of unconditional affirmation. "Did Bell go too far?" asks Wellman, ambiguously. "Does the gospel go too far?"

There is one broader burden/release scenario that would be of particular interest to *CC* readers. Bell's antipathy towards "strict and restrictive" Reformed West Michigan religion runs like an unmistakable thread through the book. He grew up and then pastored near Grand Rapids, and even though he attended Baptist and non-denominational churches, he chafes against the perceived dogmatism, Puritanism and austerity of nearby TULIP Calvinism. Thousands of local Michiganites inhaled Bell's preaching as a "breath of fresh air" offering the "non-anxious certitude of faith" paradoxically combined with a celebration of questioning and doubt.

What Wellman misses is the other, less stereotypical side of the Reformed Michigan influence on Bell. The gospel is more comprehensively about "the reclamation of culture" than the narrow saving of souls, says Bell. This sounds like an excerpt from Calvin College's mission statement. Bell explains that Jesus breaks down the sacred/secular duality, for the whole world belongs to God, an echo of the Contemporary Testimony. While I cannot offer evidence that Rob Bell actually drank from these Reformed waters, I find it unlikely that he waded in only one of the local Reformed streams.

In sum, Wellman does well to describe the multiple versions of Bell: evangelical, rock star, subversive, wit, artist, prophet. What drives him? "Bell was charged by two equally compelling impulses, a love affair with Jesus and a passion to mass communicate." Which motivated him more Wellman leaves as a question.

Rob Bell has recently had his first TV project fail in Hollywood. Wellman suspects his charisma may have expended itself. We'll see. For anyone interested in understanding the first half (DV) of Rob Bell's life, this mildly critical assessment reads with energy and insight.

Peter Schuurman is working on his PhD in Religious Studies (U Waterloo) from his home in Guelph.

German comfort

Wayne Brouwer

In the 1980s, members of Calgary's First Christian Reformed Church led monthly worship services at the city's correctional facility. It was a time of liturgical change, with new songs emerging weekly, and the language of historic confessions updated into contemporary vocabulary. Inmates at the prison appreciated the great music brought by the church team, and asked if they might keep several of the church's self-published collections in order to practice these new songs.

Returning a month later, the church volunteers were rushed by excited inmates. But it wasn't the songs that they gushed about. Instead, these prisoners were wildly intrigued by that strange document at the back of the songbooks, something with an unpronounceable name. It was the recently retranslated Heidelberg Catechism. To those who found themselves the outcasts of society, it was the best expression of Christian faith they had ever read.

Robbing Paul

There is good reason for that, of course. Zachary Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, the Catechism's authors, stole their method from the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul outlined Christianity in terms of three key ideas: (1) that humanity is irreconcilably estranged from its Creator (Rom. 1-3); (2) that God's love is wonderfully expressed in the transforming salvation brought to us through Jesus (Rom. 4-8); and (3) that our lives are best lived in service to God and others (Rom. 12-15). These themes became the familiar structure of the Heidelberg Catechism, summarized often as ***Sin/Salvation/Service*** or ***Guilt/Grace/Gratitude*** or ***"I Can't!"/"God Can!"/"Thanks!"***

While many other catechisms have appeared in history, few became as popular.

While many other catechisms have appeared in history, few became as popular and enduring as this one. The word "catechism" originated as a Greek term meaning "to hand down." The term jumped from language to language as the Christian Church expanded from culture to culture. Its idea is as old as God's work among God's people. When the Israelites were released from Egypt during the night of the Tenth Plague, they rose from table of the Passover, being commanded to use this symbolic meal as a yearly means to teach their children the meaning of life (Ex. 12:25-26). When forty years later the nation passed through the miraculously damned Jordan River to new life in the Promised Land, stones were taken from the river bottom and shaped into the first recorded children's playground, so that parents could get their offspring to ask the big questions (Josh. 4). These are visible catechisms, symbolic representations that help people ask the right questions in order to get the right answers.

Common ground

In every age, the church has produced catechisms, training tools for the young and the newly converted. The best of these usually included explanations about the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, the foundational statements of Christian identity and expression. Some then expanded with other materials almost without limits, seeking to explore every facet of theology or church life. Others were used for a time until replaced by more beneficial teaching tools.

So why has the Heidelberg Catechism retain its power and punch throughout these four-and-a-half centuries? For one thing, it has a captivating perspective. It actually speaks with our individual voices, echoing our deepest concerns. Although it addresses the head (Q&A2 – "What must you *know* . . . "), it begins with the heart: "What is your only *comfort*. . . . " In a world of distress, in every age of crisis, in the psychological disquiet of our inner selves, the Heidelberg Catechism begins where we are. We are all troubled. We are all seeking comfort. And we are all religious, knowing that forces larger than ourselves are at play in our destinies.

I regularly teach the "Standards" course at Western Theological Seminary, a Senior Class review of the Reformed Confessions. Invariably it becomes a time of rediscovery of the Heidelberg Catechism for some, and for others a joyfully unexpected courtship with a new lifelong love. Particularly interesting for me are those who emerge from Presbyterian backgrounds where the Westminster Catechism was a religion staple. Patterned in part after the Heidelberg Catechism, and birthed a century later, the Westminster Catechism is similar in length and covers many of the same themes. But its users are often overwhelmed by their perceptions of a much more personal and cohesive testimony resident in the older Heidelberg Catechism. One student told me last October that he was "blown away" by the Heidelberg Catechism, and that it has immediately replaced his cherished Westminster Catechism as his personal devotional favourite. While there is great nobleness in the Westminster's beginning Q&A ("What is the chief end of man? To know God and enjoy him forever"), the warmth and personableness of the Heidelberg easily trumps such abstractions.

Resident aliens

Second, the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism did a most marvelous thing in the first main division. When probing issues of "Sin and Misery," they kept it short and to the point, refusing to get mired in a litany of bad things we do. In fact, the genius of the Heidelberg Catechism is mirrored in the title they gave to this section. In German it is *Das Elend*, which has the connotations of alienation, or living in a land that is not one's own. While much of our talk about sins and sinfulness is often couched in terms of specific nasty deeds, the Catechism instead takes us on a journey of alienation. We are miserable because we are at a distance from God. It is not just that we do wrong acts but that we live in a world of dissonance where nothing reflects its original right relationships.

This helps us understand even more powerfully the need for "comfort." It is precisely because we are "miserable" that we long for home and help and healing and "comfort." And because we are unable to find the way home by ourselves, our misery is only deepened. There is an urgency in the Catechism's message that makes us desperate to receive God's good grace. Even though we cannot gain it on our own or earn it, we are not ourselves without it. We are barely alive in an alien environment with no way out. Misery. Desperation.

Personal testimony

Third, there is a wonderful simplicity about the Heidelberg Catechism. It takes the familiar standards of our Christian faith (Jesus' Law Summary of Matthew 22, the Apostles' Creed, the sacraments, the Keys of the Kingdom, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer), and weaves wonderful reflections on each into a seamless garment which is so integrated and psychologically fluid that we are drawn along into affirmations jumping out of our hearts long before they are charted in our heads. The Heidelberg Catechism never feels clunky or chunky, even as it moves from topic to topic and document to document. It has the same flow as a fine multi-course meal which is fully savoured at every new plate and yet unfolds as an unbroken feast from salad to dessert.

Fourth, the Heidelberg Catechism remains delightfully autobiographical and personal throughout. It keeps speaking in the first person, so that all of its theology and faith reflection is given voice by my own heart and my wrestling spirit. Not only that, but at many points, where profound doctrines are explored deeply and thoughtfully, the Catechism next asks the question, "And what does it mean to you. . . . " Theology and testimony are constantly wed in the Heidelberg; doctrine and doing are inseparable partners. Christianity is never a theological construct for the Catechism; it is a confession and a lifestyle.

This is expressed particularly well in the opening conversations about the Apostles' Creed. What does it mean that God is creator? Few reflections could be more gripping than the answers of Lord's Days 9-10, speaking to the hearts of all who have gone through disease, disaster, discouragement and doom. "How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us? We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing in creation will separate us from his love" (Q&A 28).

Making peace

Fifth, there is the irenic tone of the Catechism. There are few clues in it of the turbulent times which birthed it. The Reformation had ripped Germany apart, the second generation Reformers were battling each other, the poor masses were physically attacking the landed classes and theologians were picking at each other with increasing venom. And Heidelberg was at the heart of everything, with primary connections to the Holy Roman Empire (Elector Frederick chaired the emperor selection committee of seven), outspoken Lutherans creating the Augsburg Confession, Reformed refugees shouting the Belgic Confession in honour of its author martyred only a year before, arguments in the city about the "ubiquity" question (whether Jesus' physical nature was everywhere present along with his spiritual nature, thus allowing for it to be present in the elements of Communion), and riots from the displaced poor who had had enough of wealthy power plays. The Heidelberg Catechism chooses few sides (only briefly aligning with the Calvinists over against the Lutherans on the "ubiquity" issue in Q&A 76, and only arguing with the Roman Catholics about the Mass in a later-added Q&A 80), while consistently speaking for all Christians in a voice of humble confidence and faithful service.

Sixth, in one of its most beautiful expressions, the Heidelberg Catechism displays the powerful genius of Calvin's "third use of the Law." Martin Luther, because of his major psychological issues with the burden of "law" and the grace release that he experienced in his faith journey, clearly articulated that there were two reasons for God's Law. First came the regulation of creation (e.g., natural law). Second, the Law taught us our sinfulness, as Paul so eloquently wrote in Romans 6-7. Through Christ (as Paul exulted in Romans 8, echoing the opening verses of Romans 5), the condemnation of the Law was excised, and we experience spiritual freedom.

John Calvin, writing a half-generation later, did not disagree with Luther, but he thought that Luther's excitement about freedom in Christ missed one important dimension of the Law as noted by Paul in Galatians 5-6. Once we have learned about our sinfulness, the Law does not simply vanish. Rather it helps us begin to understand the mind of Christ and the desires that lie in the heart of God. Using Jesus' revisioning of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Calvin proclaimed that the Law was a guide to Christian gratitude.

*See **German comfort**, p. 11*

Features

Heidelberg highlights from pastors

Mary Ann Benjamins

Just recently an older member shared with me that his grandson called him before a surgery and offered comforting words to him: "Remember, Grandpa, in life and death, you belong to the Lord." The words of **Q&A 1** still have deep meaning and significance and are words that offer comfort in a world where we experience discomfort throughout our lives.

Pastor Chris Pool

I have known a man for 35 years, since he was 11 years old. His mother adopted him when she was an unmarried doctor in the early 1970s. Rob attended Christian schools and belonged to a CRC in a large U.S. city. But he fell away from Jesus in his late teens. He got in trouble with drugs. He fathered a child, never living with his son and the child's mother. In the late 1980s he joined the U.S. Army, and was stationed overseas for several years. In and out of trouble with addictions for years, sometimes he didn't communicate with his mother for many months.

After he finished military service, he stayed in the nation where he had been stationed and opened a tattoo shop. He made lots of money; spoke the local language almost like a native. He married a citizen of that nation. Yet addictions and other troubles hounded both of them for years. Several years ago his wife stole tens of thousands of dollars – finally leaving him a couple of years ago. Rob was shaken more deeply than ever before. He began to re-establish regular contact with his mother. She had never stopped writing and calling, even visiting him over the years of estrangement. At this time, he has kicked his addictions – we pray for good.

Recently he met another woman in the nation where he's living. After some time, he told his mother about her and said, "Mom, I'd like to get serious with her, but she doesn't know Jesus."

His mother was stunned and asked, "Rob, do YOU know Jesus?"

"Mom, I couldn't have gotten through my addictions and all the other bad stuff in my life if I didn't know Jesus." Then he continued, "I can't get serious about this woman until I tell her about Jesus. Mom, do you think I should teach her the Heidelberg Catechism?

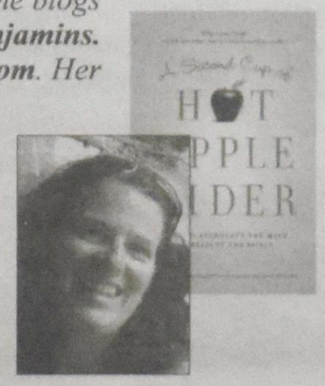
Jesus has been Rob's only comfort in a life that has come close to death more than once. Where he's living now, he continues to learn more and more to say "Jesus is Lord" with a Reformed accent, so he and others can live like and for Jesus.

Pastor Jim Dekker

While I am getting older, I am part of a generation that had to memorize the catechism. While I don't have them still memorized, I appreciate the importance they were given in my life when growing up as that has shaped both my understanding and use of them.

Pastor Henry Kranenburg

Mary Ann Benjamins is a supply teacher, writer and awards manager for the The Word Guild. *She blogs at* ***maryannbenjamins.wordpress.com****. Her cancer survival story can be found in* A Second Cup of Hot Apple Cider: Words to Stimulate the Mind and Delight the Spirit.



Survey says...

A few months ago I sent out a mini-survey asking more than 40 Christian Reformed Church pastors if they regularly preach the Heidelberg Catechism. From the 25 respondents, I gleaned the following interesting information:

14 churches still preach the Heidelberg Catechism regularly, often in their evening services in rotation with the other confessions.

- "Yes – Usually Sunday evenings." *Pastor Paul Vandenbrink*
- "Right now I am working through the Lord's Days as part of our evening service. *Pastor Ben Ponsen*
- "I use the HC quite regularly. Right now I am going through it in the evenings and I am also using it in the mornings as we go over the Ten Commandments. I also use parts of it regularly as a profession of faith (along with the Belgic and Dordt)." *Pastor Josh Tuininga*
- "Last year I preached through the Heidelberg Catechism in our evening services." *Pastor Andrew Vis*

Of the remaining 11 churches, most still do sermon series using sections of the Heidelberg Catechism:

- "I'm just finishing a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments from the catechism. I plan to go into the Lord's Prayer in the new year." *Pastor Jim Dekker*
- I typically preach one sermon series a year on the Catechism." *Pastor Derek Bouma*

A number of pastors see the use of the catechism as old-fashioned: "As much as I appreciate the Heidelberg Catechism, I don't believe it helps us speak a Christian voice as well in a secularized and postmodern culture as the *Contemporary Testimony: Our World Belongs to God* does." Another pastor qualified limited use of the catechism because the congregation typically only has one or two "old-style worship" services per month.

So what is the number one reason for not preaching the Heidelberg Catechism on a regular basis? The demise of the evening service. Many responses begin with this qualifier, "Here, they do not have a regular evening service. . . ."

Another pastor states, "They only have one service, so I have plans for some Heidelberg Catechism series in the near future. It will be a regular, however not weekly, part of my preaching schedule." – *MAB*

WHAT IS THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM?

A kid's perspective

I've never heard the word before. *Cassandra, Grade 8*

Catechism – a place my older brother goes to learn more about God. *Mariel, Grade 5*

I've heard it before, but I don't know what it means. *Deborah, Grade 7*

It's the laws of the Lord – Pastor Andrew did a series on them. *Anna, Grade 8*

I've heard the word before but I don't know what it means. *Isabella, Grade 5*

Isn't it something that helps you understand the Bible better? *Laura, Grade 6*

I've heard of it. But I have no idea. Isn't it a study type of thing with questions and answers? *Hannah, Grade 8*

What is a Heidelberg? *Evan, Grade 5*

I don't know what that is. *Jacob, Grade 8*

A place you go to meet new people, have fun and learn more about God. *Kendra, Grade 5*

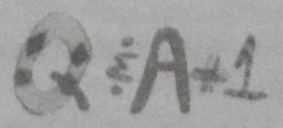
Some sort of youth group thing. *Alexis, Grade 7*

It's a church group that talks about problems in this world that they need to address and about God and problems that teenagers are experiencing. *Trenton, Grade 7*

I have never heard of that. *Grada, Grade 8*

It's for teens, mostly in high school, to get together and talk about their Christian faith. *Alyson, Grade 6*

– MAB



Artwork above by Jada DeBoer ("Q&A 1") and Madylan DeBoer ("Heidelberg Catechism").

German comfort *continued from p. 10*

Prayerful gratitude

This is how the Ten Commandments find their way into the third section of the Catechism, exploring "Gratitude." While our world sees "commands" as restrictive and repressive (with the Ten Commandments often used as examples of the most outmoded religious bullies of all), the Heidelberg Catechism explains them as guardians against dehumanizing evils, opportunities to live joyfully and expressions of the best in us who were made in the image of God. In this the Heidelberg Catechism is more "Reformed" than many "Reformed" liturgies which consistently deploy the Ten Commandments in the second rather than the third use of the Law (which is, by the way, the manner in which they are expressed in their original declarations, both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5).

Finally, the Heidelberg Catechism reaches for heaven while remaining firmly grounded on earth in its concluding beautiful exploration of the Lord's Prayer. Every answer is a powerful prayer in its own right. Every expression is a testimony to God. Every statement is a confession of faith.

These are not words to read merely for right theology; they are living witnesses of thoughtful faith and joyful Christian pilgrimage. Four hundred fifty years from now, whether or not Jesus has returned, those who come after us will still be celebrating with these marvelous testimonies.

Wayne Brouwer is former pastor of Iron Springs (Alta.) Christian Reformed Church and London (Ont.) First Christian Reformed Church and now teaches at Western Theological Seminary and Hope College, both in Michigan.

Features

Harmonious blend: The Heidelberg Catechism

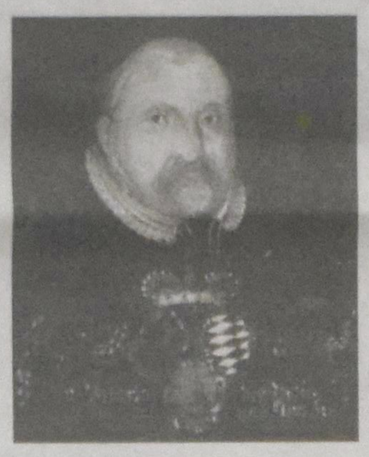
Bert denBoggende

Historical background

Described by the American church historian Philip Schaff as the most sweet-spirited and experiential of the expositions of Calvinism, the Heidelberg Catechism was published in January 1563. Translated into some two dozen languages, it is the most extensively used confession of faith among the Reformed Churches, and its continued use, according to the *New Dictionary of Theology*, is "a tribute to its clarity, brevity and warm piety." In spite of such praise, general surveys of the Reformation period have given it little attention. Even the CRC church historian B.K. Kuiper only notes in *The Church in History* that it is "one of the clearest and most complete expressions of Reformed interpretation of the Bible." For this 450th anniversary celebration, I want to sketch first the German context and the development of catechisms, then give brief descriptions of the three major figures involved, and close with the problem of authorship.

The German context

The 1555 Peace of Augsburg, an agreement between Catholic Emperor Charles V and the Lutheran princes, allowed princes, knights and free cities to practise Lutheranism within their domains. However, it was silent about the legal position of Calvinism. By 1555 the Palatine elector Otto Henry had adopted Melanchthon's moderate Lutheranism. Lutheranism, however, was divided and Heidelberg's university became the scene of a bitter quarrel between rigorist and moderate Lutherans, mainly about the Lord's Supper. Most Lutheran princes supported the rigorists, but Otto Henry's successor, Frederick III, was so alienated by the rigorists that he began to incline to Calvinism and continued the policy of his predecessor who had already appointed a French Calvinist to a Heidelberg chair. First he invited Caspar Olevianus to Heidelberg in 1560 and the next year he invited the Zurich theologian Peter Martyr Vermigli, an Italian ex-Augustinian prior and reformer, to teach theology in Heidelberg. Excusing himself on account of his age, he recommended Zacharias Ursinus for the position, thus setting the stage for the catechism.



(Clockwise from top left) Frederick III, Elector Palatine; The Heidelberg Catechism: 1563; Zacharias Ursinus; Caspar Olevianus.

Catechisms

Some catechetical instruction preparatory to baptism, perhaps including responsive material, seems to have existed in the second century. During the Anglo-Saxon period, expositions of the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer were popular, forming the basis of medieval instruction manuals. Luther's *Short Catechism* of 1529, written in response to the spiritual ignorance in Saxony, initiated a new stage with his responsive method. His catechism – the word dating from the Reformation period – had three purposes: to instruct people of all ages and classes; to prepare for confirmation (Calvin's citation in *Institutes*, IV.xix.4, may not be historically accurate), and to conceal "denominational" purpose, a point important to the Heidelberg Catechism. Catechism authors included Calvin, Oecolampadius, Bullinger, and Jan à Lasco (about whom Abraham Kuyper wrote his dissertation). Even the Jesuit Peter Canisius' catechism of 1554 followed Luther's method. The result was that different places used different catechisms.

Frederick III the Pious

Frederick (1515-1576), the eldest son of John II, Count of Simmern, was brought up a strict Catholic. In 1537 he married the Lutheran Maria of Brandenburg-Culmbach, but didn't become a Lutheran until 1546. In 1557 he succeeded his father in Simmern and two years later also the childless Otto Henry. His religious interest not only earned him the moniker "the Pious," but also led him toward Calvinism, which he adopted in 1561. His Calvinism was opposed by his eldest son Ludwig, a strict Lutheran, and made his position in the empire insecure. In this difficult situation he envisaged an ecclesiastical reformation that would conciliate as many as possible of the contending Protestant parties.

Caspar Olevianus

Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587), a son of a relatively wealthy and prominent baker, was born Treves (Trier), a free city located on the border of Germany and Luxembourg. In 1550 he went to Paris to study law. In Bourges he vainly attempted to rescue Frederick's son from drowning. The shocking event impelled him to become a preacher. Between 1557 and 1559 he studied theology in Geneva, Zurich and Lausanne, becoming acquainted with Calvin, Beza, Farel, Bullinger and Peter Martyr. In 1559 he returned to still solidly Catholic Treves, teaching logic and philosophy. Although a layman, he taught catechism and preached evangelical sermons, which were received so well that many converted. The Catholic archbishop, however, had him and many others imprisoned. After ten weeks confinement German princes obtained their liberty under condition of a heavy fine and immediate banishment. In January 1560 Frederick III invited Olevianus to Heidelberg, where he became court preacher and church superintendent. In 1576 his prominent position led to his banishment under Elector Ludwig VI's Lutheran reaction. He wrote several commentaries and works on the covenant of grace.

Zacharias Ursinus

Zacharias Baer (1534-1583), who later Latinized his name to Ursinus, was born in Breslau in Silesia, then an Austrian province (now Wroclaw, Poland). Although his parents were poor, he could study in Wittenberg in 1550 because Breslau's Senate underwrote his expenses, with the understanding that after his studies he would return to Breslau. In 1557 Melanchthon, who had a high regard for his intellectual gifts and spiritual maturity, asked Ursinus to accompany him to Worms and Heidelberg. He then travelled to and studied in Strasbourg, Basel, Lausanne and Geneva, where Calvin presented him with a complete signed set of his work. Studies in Lyon and Orleans gave him proficiency in Hebrew. In Breslau Lutherans dismissed him, charging that his views on the Lord's Supper were more Calvinist than Lutheran. Moving to Zurich, he became friends with Bullinger and Peter Martyr, whose explication of Calvinism impressed him. In spite of Ursinus' dislike for controversy, Peter Martyr recommended him to Frederick III to head the College of Wisdom. In September 1561 he arrived in Heidelberg. Shortly afterwards he was appointed to occupy the chair of dogmatics. Unlike Olevianus, he was not a very good preacher, but he was a better scholar. In fact, he became the leading theologian of the Reformed Protestants in the Palatine. His collected catechetical lectures became very popular, especially in the Netherlands. In 1577, shortly after Ludwig VI became elector, he left Heidelberg for Neustadt.

Who wrote the Heidelberg Catechism?

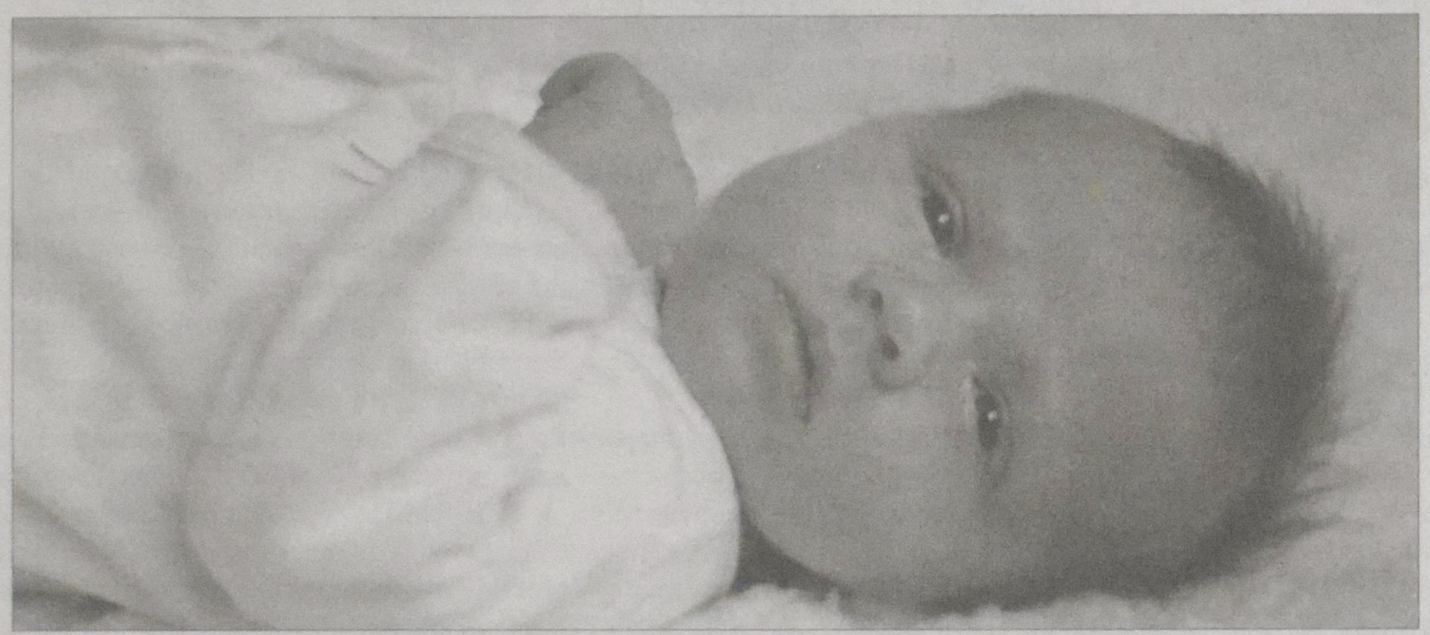
Heidelberg's theological faculty drew up a reform program of which the catechism was only one part. It also included practical and liturgical reforms, such as the removal of images of saints, vestments, baptismal fonts, organs and the acceptance of the breaking of the bread in the celebration of the Lord's Supper; a church order (1563) and a consistory order (1564).

The team of Palatine theologians could choose from several catechisms, including two by Ursinus. Frederick, realizing that the existing and often conflicting catechisms were unsuitable for his ecumenical realm, asked the theologians to compose a catechism which everyone could use. With some justice Frederick can be regarded as the father of the catechism. While historians agree that the theologians borrowed extensively, they don't agree who wrote the catechism. No one ever claimed authorship. The case for 26-year-old Olevianus as major author was made in 1644, but there are solid reasons to regard the 28-year-old Ursinus as the primary author. Others were involved, including Frederick. He personally improved question 78, added for the second edition question 80 in response to decisions of the Council of Trent, and seems to have been responsible for the division of 52 Lord's Days. The synod he called in January 1563 approved the catechism on 19 January. According to the printed preface, the catechism was composed in German and Latin.

It quickly ran through many editions. Petrus Datheen translated it into Dutch and soon it became a major confession in the Netherlands. Its irenic and mediating tone may have been due to Ursinus and Frederick. Remarkable is the use of the first person pronoun, often in the singular, which gives it a personal quality. Another peculiarity is the figurative interpretation of Christ's descent into hell; following Calvin, Christ did not literally descend into hell. Designed to promote consensus, it failed to reconcile the opposing groups. Nevertheless, as one author remarked, "In the Heidelberg Catechism, Lutheran inwardness, Melanchthonian clearness, Zwinglian simplicity and Calvinistic fire were harmoniously blended."

Bert den Boggende has a Ph.D. in British history and is a retired teacher. He lives in Brooks, Alta.

Columns



We serve a God of new beginnings and second chances, one who holds both newborn and grandma in his hands.

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke

New beginnings

A month ago I sat at my desk writing about a funeral. While I laboured in deep thoughts surrounding life and death, my dear daughter-in-law Willene laboured to deliver a new life into the world. Cassandra Erin VanderSlikke, our first granddaughter, was born on the evening of November 20, 2012.

Daniel was still up when his daddy called with the news. I handed him the receiver and watched his face light up as he heard of his sister's arrival. "Did he get out of Mommy's tummy, Daddy?" he asked. He looked at me and declared, "Nana, he got out!" (Gender specific pronouns mean little to a four-year-old.) The next day Poppa and I took him to the hospital to meet the newcomer. Suddenly, our little Daniel seemed all grown up next to this tiny bundle.

I shouldn't have been surprised at the tears that flowed when I first saw her. Newborn beauty has that effect on me. I had been waiting and praying for her for months already. Through the wonder of ultrasound, we'd been told to expect a baby girl. In my mind I dubbed her "Tinkerbell." Ever suspicious of technology though, I held off shopping the pink side of the kids' clothing stores, just in case she turned out to be more of a Peter Pan.

I examined her slender fingers and stroked her silky cheek. I wondered what the future might hold for her, this brand new person who slept so peacefully in my arms. I waited for her eyes to open. Then I realized that we're always waiting for something when it comes to children. While I've no desire to wish away her life or mine, I admit I look forward to the first time she smiles at me or the day she calls me Nana. Someday she may stand by the kitchen window and jump up and down with glee as she sees me pulling into the driveway, like her brother used to do, not so long ago.

I thought of her cousin Romario. Only last year he was the babe in arms. Now he's a strapping toddler who spends his days giggling, dancing and throwing everything he owns into the bathtub, just to drive his mother crazy.

Yes, it all goes by so quickly. I've seen enough to know that I need to savour every stage of development as it unfolds. For now Cassandra is a sleepy little cherub – ours to cuddle and admire. Already she seems to change every time I see her.

There's something exquisitely hopeful about newborns and the new beginnings they represent. And here we are on the threshold of a whole New Year. There's something distinctly exciting and beautiful about that as well. Potential is alluring.

I look at the clean calendar on my desk and the empty pages ahead in my journal. What will they look like a year from now?

2013. Maybe this will be the year I'll eat better, stress less and exercise regularly. Maybe I'll watch more sunsets, take more pictures and write more stories. Perhaps I'll get my columns sent in on time. It could happen. I might even quit dragging worry around behind me like a set of training wheels I rely on to add stability to my faith. It's possible (unlikely, but possible).

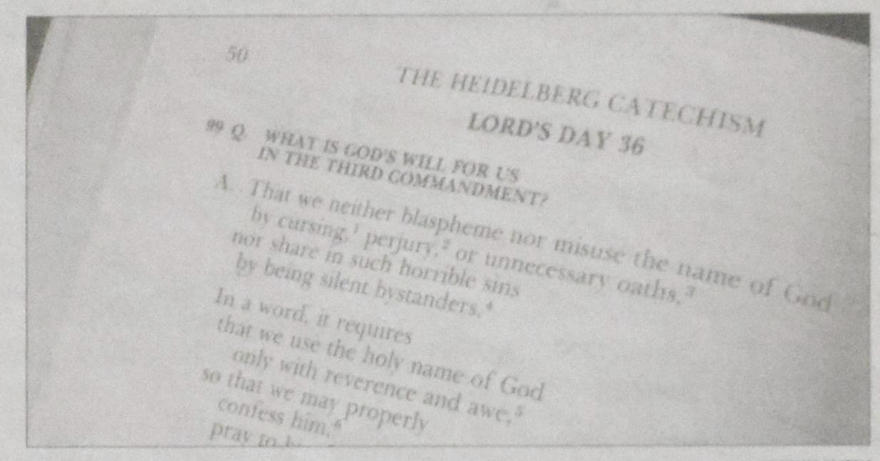
Or maybe I'll finally have the wisdom to simply appreciate reality as it comes, trusting God to continue working with me and within me, according to a timetable and purpose known only to him at this point. Don't get me wrong. I don't see myself as a pawn on some cosmic chessboard, moved only ever by an unseen hand. I have input in my life – choices to make, passions to pursue, a God-given freewill. And yet somehow he uses even that to mold me and shape me and bring me closer to the person he intended me to be. It's a grand mystery, far too big for my finite mind and filled with infinite possibilities. Whatever this coming year may hold – all the joy, grief, accomplishments and challenges – the whole adventure is guaranteed to work for my good and God's glory.

I came across these words from Elisabeth Elliott: "Today is mine. Tomorrow is none of my business. If I peer anxiously into the fog of the future, I will strain my spiritual eyes so that I will not see clearly what is required of me now."

So Happy New Year! Here's to the God of new beginnings and second chances, the God who never gives up, the God who holds the newborn and the grandma alike in his loving hands. This is the God whose reach goes well beyond the next 365 days and on into eternity. His mercies are new every morning and I'm ready to walk with him, one day at a time.

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

Artful Eye


50
THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM
LORD'S DAY 36
99 Q. WHAT IS GOD'S WILL FOR US IN THE THIRD COMMANDMENT?
A. That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God by cursing,[1] perjury,[2] or unnecessary oaths,[3] nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.[4]
In a word, it requires that we use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe,[5] so that we may properly confess him,[6]

CATHY SMITH

Delayed Reaction

In Memory of HGV

"Today is review.
John,
What is your only comfort in life and death?"

"That wasn't in the catechism lesson this week."

"Ivan,
What do you mean by the Providence of God?"

"I can't remember."

"Willis,
What do you mean by ***a holy catholic church***?"

"I don't know."

"Sietze,
What does God require in the third commandment?"

"I don't care."

"I don't care?
Did you say ***I don't care?***
I have bowed until I can bow no more.
Nobody says ***I don't care*** in my class."

You grabbed your grubby Stetson.
You opened the door.
Pale and shaking, you yelled,
"I would rather have you say ***God damn*** than ***I don't care***."

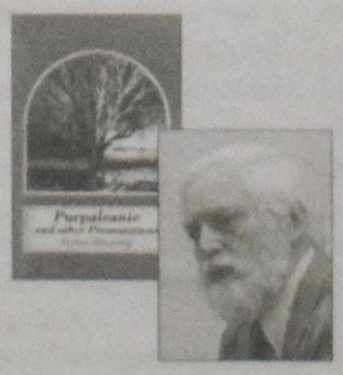
We laughed,
surprised at the words you knew.

It didn't occur to me until now
that ***God damn*** and ***I don't care***
mean the same thing.

I wish I could tell you
who must have cried "Woe is me" all the way home
what a good catechism lesson that was
on the third commandment.

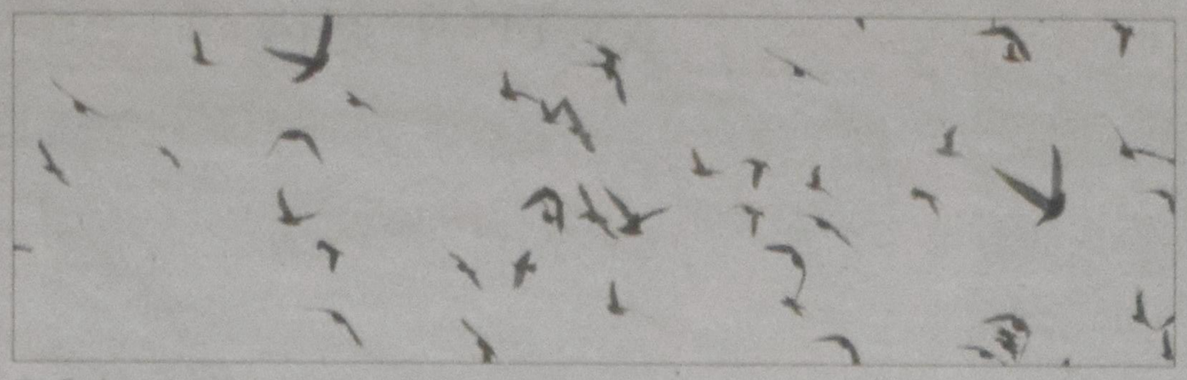
~ Sietze Buning

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.



Sietze Buning is the pen name of Stanley Wiersma, beloved English professor at Calvin College. Dr. Wiersma passed away in 2011 at the age of 86. Delayed Reaction *is reprinted with permission from* Purpaleanie and other Permutations, *The Middleburg Press, Orange City, Iowa.*

Columns



God's love frees me to grow.

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer

A new yoke

My daughter is well over a year now and nowhere near walking. She swims across the hardwood floor on her belly at super speeds, adds a little knee action when she's on a grippy surface like carpet, but get her into walking stance and she will hardly put one foot in front of the other. She's just not that interested. One of my nieces was the opposite by this age. She was an early walker – an early runner, as a matter of fact – and she would take off at the first opportunity and much to my sister's consternation. A toddler can disappear into a crowd faster than I would have believed. This child needed some restraining, and while we didn't want to dampen her enthusiasm for speed and adventure, neither did we want to lose sight of her for a second in a busy shopping mall. I doubt we'll have to worry much about restraining my little girl. If anything, she'll need some encouragement to get up and at it.

Some children need to be contained, others need to be pushed. I think there's a spiritual principle in that. We all have inclinations, tendencies, that require God to either hold us back or move us forward for our own well-being. As any loving parent, God deals with us according to our natures.

Is it my conservative Dutch heritage that drives my inclination to seriousness, to duty, and sometimes to exacting standards? When it comes to my faith, I easily grasp the God of justice and judgment, the "cause-and-effect" approach to religion. Honestly, I can kind of relate to the Pharisees who clung to their rules with a death-grip; if you have the right length tassels, wash your hands the right number of times, recite the right prayer at the right moment, God just might rubber stamp you into heaven, or at least prevent you from contracting a horrific disease here on earth. With all the dark stories in the media these days – school shootings, deadly natural disasters, a six-year-old boy fighting an awful form of meningitis only to die – my tendency to view God in this Old-Testament, law-oriented way is on overdrive. Anne Lamott's description of perfectionism accurately captures this tendency: ". . . perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping-stone just right, you won't have to die." If I can be the perfect mother, housekeeper, Christian, if I can hold it all together, bad things may not happen.

Set free to grow

So when it comes to God, I have to work really hard to hear grace. Self-condemnation is as comfortable as a second skin, but believing I am loved, forgiven, accepted just as I am – that's an effort. The ten commandments give me some workable standards, but who is this God who insists his yoke is easy and his burden is light? Sometimes he feels like a stranger. And yet the season of greatest spiritual growth in my life happened a decade ago when I gave myself permission to seek him, to hear his words of affirmation and shut out the *don'ts* and *ought's* for a time. It felt like heresy; it felt like selling out. But choosing to believe that I lived under love and was covered by grace reignited a faith that was flickering perilously. Still now, my comfort zone is to shoulder that old burden and cling tightly to the rules. But if I really strain to hear it, I can catch whispers of grace; if I shift my burden of guilt just a little, I begin to feel the edges of the light yoke; if I search, I see flashes of the God of love smiling with pleasure at me.

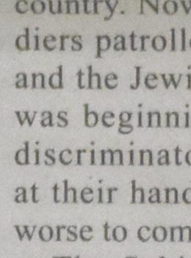
Dare I believe that my heavenly Father, knowing me to be a child who shies from comfort, is pushing me headlong toward it? Since my natural tendency is self-condemnation, is it wrong to hope that God is clearing away my self-inflicted restraints and encouraging me to walk in acceptance? It's not that I don't need correcting, that I don't need to mature and develop into Christ-likeness. It's just that while the rules keep me "safe," they also keep me stagnant. Love frees me to grow. My new year's resolution for 2013 is to chase *that* God, the God who sings over me, who has me tucked away beneath his wings, who loves me with an everlasting love. I have to fight my nature to find that God; I actually have to work at it. But everything changes when I walk with him.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She is being amazed and humbled by Eric Metaxas' biography, Bonhoeffer.

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis

Authority and office: the witness of Dr. Sietsma



On a Monday early in 1942, the Rev. Dr. Kornelis Sietsma was arrested by the German *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) at his home in Amsterdam. The previous day he had preached a sermon on Luke 4:1-13, the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, in which he emphasized the temptations that come with power. This was at his own congregation, the Schinkelkerk, which worshipped in a 50-year-old building in the Dutch capital city. At the offering he announced that a collection would be taken for the denomination's mission to the Jews, something that had come to the attention of the SD, whose agents had attended his church that day.

German troops had occupied the Netherlands for not quite two years. Queen Wilhelmina and her government had taken refuge in London and the occupiers set up a pro-nazi régime in its place. All of this occurred despite the Dutch declaration of neutrality at the beginning of the war in 1939. However, only months later Germany violated Dutch neutrality and invaded the country. Now German soldiers patrolled the streets, and the Jewish population was beginning to receive discriminatory treatment at their hands, with much worse to come.

All the other authoritative offices we hold find their ultimate point of origin in this central office given by God himself.

The Schinkelkerk was part of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, a denomination that began as a merger of two Reformed denominations dissenting from the established church. This union was brought about in 1892 by Abraham Kuyper, who would go on to become Prime Minister of the Netherlands shortly after the turn of the 20th century. In his own political thought Kuyper had recovered an emphasis on something he called *soevereiniteit in eigen kring*, or sovereignty in its own sphere – a principle in sharp contrast to state absolutism and certainly to the pretensions of any totalitarian régime.

A week and a half earlier, Sietsma had presided over the meeting of the Schinkelkerk consistory, which was faced with two issues of political significance: the status of liturgical prayers for the exiled Royal Family, and the *Arbeitsdienst*, or the mandatory service imposed on young people by the Germans. These had been raised in a letter issued by the General Synod of the Reformed Churches which was communicated to the congregations, calling them to discourage their young men from participating in the *Arbeitsdienst* and to remember the Royal Family in worship services. Sietsma commended the courage of this synodical letter at that meeting.

True authority

Sunday, 1 February, would mark Sietsma's final sermon. SD officials were in the congregation that day when the special collection was taken. During his prayers, Sietsma recalled the fourth birthday of Queen Wilhelmina's little granddaughter, Princess Beatrix, which had occurred on Saturday, and asked God for the safe return of the Royal Family to the Netherlands. All of this was duly noted by the visitors, who took this incriminating information back to their superiors.

Following his arrest, Sietsma was put on trial for provoking resistance to the governing authorities, collecting funds for the Jews, and praying for the royal family's return. During his trial he admitted, under questioning, that the lust for power, on which he had preached, was present also in national socialism. Sietsma was held in prison until July and then transferred to the concentration camp at Dachau. Two months later, at only 46 years of age, he was dead, having paid the ultimate price for his courage in the face of his persecutors.

Prior to the outbreak of war, Sietsma wrote a little book called, *Ambtsgedachte*, which was published posthumously and translated half a century later as *The Idea of Office* (Paideia Press, 1985). In this brief volume the author ties the exercise of authority to the possession of office, arguing that "office is the only justification and the proper limitation of any human exercise of power and authority." Apart from office, there is no obligation to obey another person. There is no natural right for one person to rule over someone else. Whether the German SD ever saw this book is unknown, but if they had done so, they could not have failed to recognize the implications of Sietsma's approach for the nazi claim to Aryan racial superiority over other peoples.

Only *office*, and not the mere possession of power, can confer authority. The principal office we exercise in God's world is that of divine image-bearer (Gen. 1:26-27). All the other authoritative offices we hold find their ultimate point of origin in this central office given by God himself. Sietsma understood this and willingly accepted the consequences of living it out before the face of the God he loved and served.

David T. Koyzis teaches politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and is currently seeking a publisher for his book on authority, office and the image of God. This story is based on Constantijn J. Sikke's book, Een waarlijk vrije: levensschets van Dr Kornelis Sietsma *(*A Truly Free Man: A Sketch of the Life of Dr. Kornelis Sietsma*) (Amsterdam: Kirchner, 1946).*

Columns

Stewardship by the numbers

Many Christians feel called to serve God through environmental stewardship, yet are overwhelmed by the enormity of the issues facing us today. This is the second in a three-part series that offers practical, concrete steps towards improving our care of creation.

Part II: Energy conservation

Jordan Hoogendam

Like water, we do not pay full cost for the energy we use. Instead, substantial government (i.e. tax bill) subsidies cover the development of infrastructure for large-scale plants such as hydroelectric, nuclear, natural gas and coal. More recently (at least in Ontario), the government has also provided some funding for renewable energy sources such as biogas, micro-hydro, wind power and solar energy. Remove the subsidies and, when confronted with the actual costs associated with the creation of energy, it is clear that energy is expensive. Further, energy created from non-renewable resources is finite. Whether you are motivated by your pocketbook, your concern for the environment or both, it goes without saying that reducing your overall energy use is a good place to start.

So how much energy are we using? For a big-picture view, check out *Canadian Geographic*'s Energy Use Map: **canadiangeographic.ca**.

When I compare my energy use per year over the last few years, I calculate that our household uses approximately 3,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) a year of electricity, and about 2,000 cubic meters of natural gas a year. This works out to a combined total usage of about 17,500 equivalent kWh per year. With two adults in our house, we use about 77 percent of what the average Ontarian consumes (11,221 kWh/person x two people). Not too bad – but honestly, not too great either. I know we can do better.

Energy detective

So how does the average person go about saving energy? The first and most essential step is to understand how much energy you use. This could be a monthly review of your electricity bill and comparison to years gone by. Or, for those who like a real-time picture of what is happening in your home (as my wife and I do) you could install a real-time energy meter. We installed a T.E.D. ("The Energy Detective," **theenergydetective.com**), that connects to our main electrical panel, and monitors real-time electricity use. This unit costs approximately $250, and requires the assistance of an electrician to install.

We keep T.E.D. in our living room in a highly visible spot. T.E.D. reports how much energy we are using in kilowatt hours, but also in dollars/hour. We have found this instantaneous feedback to be very effective; as a house-guest said, "I am always worried, *what will Ted think?* I want to keep 'him' happy!" With this sentiment in mind, we all found ourselves turning off extraneous lights and appliances. Through this, we saw a 15 percent reduction in electricity use, simply because we became more aware of what we were using.

Other energy saving measures we implemented:

- Replacement of incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs (CFL), and Light Emitting Diode (LED) lights. A 60 W incandescent lamp can be replaced by a 15 W Compact Fluorescent (CFL), or an 8 W LED lamp. As prices drop on LED technology, I expect to see that become a standard for lighting. To calculate your own potential savings check out: **www.easywebcalculators.com/cf.htm**.

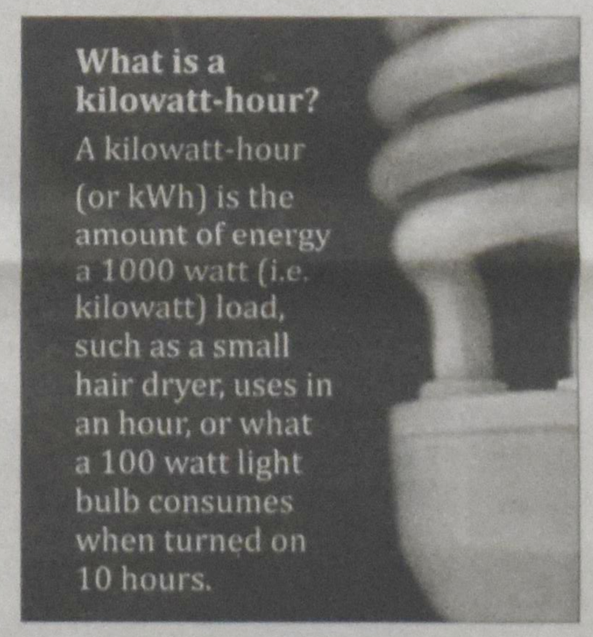
- Replacement of an old thermostat (mercury-based dial) with a programmable thermostat with a time of day setback to reduce energy use during the night and while away.

- Purchase of energy star rated appliances, programmed computers and laptops to conserve energy when not in use.

- Elimination, wherever possible, of phantom loads (loads associated with appliances and electronics that use energy while plugged in, even when they are turned "off"). Any device that does not have a mechanical switch often has some minor power usage. To do this: eliminate devices with "wall warts" or AC-DC cubes (often used to power phones and alarm clocks, for example). An easy solution is to plug these items into switched power bars, and turn the entire bar off when not in use.

As with water, the first step is conservation. Every unit of energy not used is one unit that does not need to be generated and transported. This reduces the burden on our energy generation and transmission systems. The items listed above are pretty easy retrofits, and represent minimal investments for great returns. Not to mention, they all have the benefit of reducing your environmental footprint.

Jordan Hoogendam is an Engineer who lives in Kitchener, Ont, with his wife and family, where he seeks to become more sustainable at home and in his work. In February, this series will conclude with examples of renewable energy generation.


What is a kilowatt-hour?
A kilowatt-hour (or kWh) is the amount of energy a 1000 watt (i.e. kilowatt) load, such as a small hair dryer, uses in an hour, or what a 100 watt light bulb consumes when turned on 10 hours.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien

You may have Dutch roots if . . .

Meindert van der Galien

We have a stainless steel utensil for slicing cheese that belonged to my grandmother, who was born in 1875. My grandparents used it, and my parents; now I use it all the time. It has sliced a lot of cheese, never needs sharpening, and remains as shiny and new looking as it was in grandmother's day. The amazing thing is that it slices a lot better than any of the modern cheese slicers I've seen. They have plastic or wooden handles that usually break off.

We also have a neat Dutch PeDe coffee grinder on a kitchen wall. It hasn't been used in years. It used to hang in the entrance room and then last winter I took it apart, washed it and painted its wooden base. It's old but looks so new. A picture of a windmill adorns the top half. My parents used it daily, but you'd never know from looking that it ground up thousands of coffee beans.

Furthermore, there is pickled herring in the refrigerator (and not just at Christmas). People who love herring also enjoy buttermilk and sauerkraut. That's me! Don't be fooled by the yogurt containers in the freezer. They're great for home-grown beans, apple sauce or strawberries. The small Dutch spoons are used for stirring coffee and for eating boiled eggs at breakfast. Sound familiar?

You may have Dutch roots if . . .

. . . You open the freezer and are excited to find a container of ice-cream, only to discover it's full of homemade apple sauce.

You never trust that the yogurt or margarine containers in the fridge hold yogurt or margarine.

You have a spoon collection.

You've eaten *oliebollen* at New Years.

You enjoy chocolate sprinkle (*hagelslag*) sandwiches.

You have cousins over six feet tall who wear size 14 shoes.

You have soup and sandwiches for Sunday lunch.

The most frequently-uttered phrase growing up was "Turn off the lights!"

You drink tea with breakfast, coffee at 10 a.m, tea at 3 p.m, and coffee again at 8 p.m. (with cookies or biscuits of course!)

You collect coupons like they're going out of style.

Your Oma had a calendar with everyone's birthday and anniversaries spelled out in capital letters (bonus points if it hung in the bathroom!).

You've been known to recycle aluminum foil. And Ziploc bags.

You own a utensil for cutting cheese.

You have at least five relatives with the same name (and somehow you always know which one is being talked about).

You make the bed in your hotel room.

You like *dubbel zout dropjes*, and have tricked a friend into trying one.

Your fridge is always stocked with leftovers.

You prefer Do-It-Yourself because it's cheaper than hiring someone.

You reuse teabags.

You have an afghan knitted by your Oma.

And finally, you know you have Dutch roots when you're laughing along with this list, which I got from a friend, because you can relate to most of it. Enjoy your leftover *oliebollen* and *Gelukkig Niew Jaar*.

Meindert van der Galien was four years old when his family immigrated to Canada in 1953. They flew KLM. His father had heard of many immigrants being very seasick on the ships crossing the Atlantic and didn't want that to happen to his family.

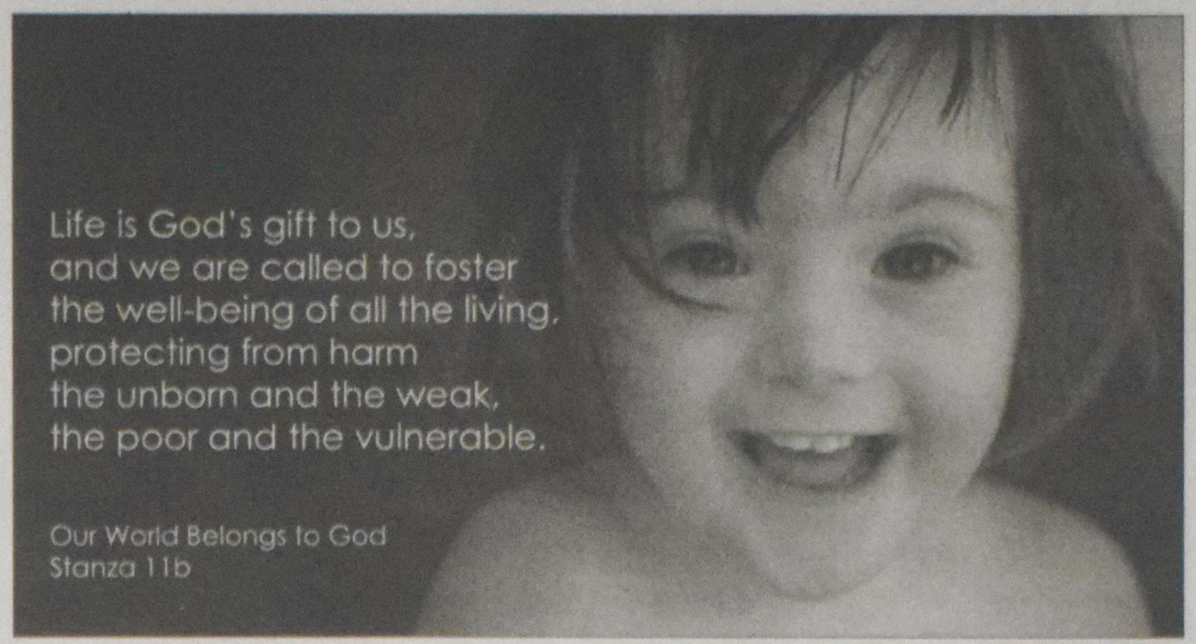
News

At life's raw edges: Abortion and the church's role

Shannon Jammal-Hollemans and Steve van de Hoef

January 20, 2013 is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. For the church, this is an opportunity to reflect on questions such as: What does it really mean to value the sanctity of human life? How far does this call extend? What does it look like to protect the unborn, weak, poor and vulnerable?

Abortion is just one of many issues connected to the sanctity of human life. The Office of Social Justice has a mandate from the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church to raise awareness about abortion in our churches. The CRC position is nuanced and issues surrounding abortion can be personally painful and politically divisive, so we desire to approach the issue of abortion with a posture of humility; unfortunately, churches and Christian organizations haven't always done so. For the upcoming Sanctity of Human Life Sunday we wondered how we might speak to abortion without ignoring the broad scope of issues that are tightly knit to it because, frankly, this is about issues of life and death.


Life is God's gift to us,
and we are called to foster
the well-being of all the living,
protecting from harm
the unborn and the weak,
the poor and the vulnerable.
Our World Belongs to God
Stanza 11b

OFFICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE.

Acknowledge complexity

If churches are going to work effectively to lower the number of abortions and provide healing, we need to recognize that this is a complex issue, as illustrated by the following facts. First, there are likely post-abortive women and men (that is, those who have had abortions) in the pews of nearly every North American church. A 2008 study in the U.S. found that one in five women who have an abortion are "born again" or Evangelical Christians.

Second, the reasons women have abortions are not cut and dry. Most of those who choose abortion do so because of their lack of financial resources, lack of familial or relational support, or because having a child would threaten their ability to complete their education or earn a living wage.

It's also important to remember that abortion is not just a North American problem, but an international one. Recent studies in Canada have found an increasing number of immigrants are choosing abortion for gender selection. Over the past year, horrific stories of forced abortion in nations like China have shown how abortion is not always a woman's choice.

And finally, while adoption is a wonderful alternative to abortion, many women are not comfortable with it because of their cultural community's experience with adoption as a tool of colonization and assimilation.

Be ready to step up

The reach of abortion is not limited to certain age or economic groups. It is also not simply a matter of individual choice and responsibility; systemic issues like poverty, racism, economics and education, among others, also play a role. If we are going to encourage women to carry a pregnancy to term, the church needs to be there to offer support both before and after that baby is born. This support cannot be limited to ministries of mercy, but must involve advocating on behalf of those vulnerable to abortion, taking action to empower them in every arena of their lives.

In both Canada and the United States, abortion is legal and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Recent public debate in Canada concerning Motion 312 – a motion that came before Parliament in November 2012 to study the legal definition of a human being that was seen by many as a way to re-open the so-called "abortion debate" – shows that Canadian society remains deeply divided concerning abortion laws, and that there is little public or political will to change them. Furthermore, the entrenched polarization of this debate has rendered sound and civil debate on issues like sex selection abortion (the subject of MP Mark Warawa's motion M-408) nearly impossible. But an active response to abortion goes far beyond specific abortion legislation.

Grace-filled community

Abortion can be prevented by creating easy and abundant access to educational resources and birth control materials. This is particularly true for women who, for various reasons, have much less control over their lives or who do not have easy access to birth control information or affordable materials. Abortion can be prevented by investing in social services for women and their families who are at high risk of having abortions. Finally we can – as the church – fully embrace and include post-abortive women and men in our community of grace.

Shannon Jammal-Hollemans and Steve van de Hoef are staff at the Christian Reformed Church in North America's Office of Social Justice. For more information, and to find resources for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, visit ***crcjustice.org/life****.*

Timeline of Canadian abortion policy

1869 – The Canadian Parliament prohibits abortion by law under penalty of life imprisonment.

1892 – The Canadian Parliament criminalizes abortion.

1969 – Abortion is decriminalized in Canada, making it possible for abortions to be performed in hospitals under some circumstances. Abortions were provided at the discretion of a hospital committee. That same year, an abortion clinic in Montreal is raided and Dr. Morgentaler is charged with conspiracy to committ abortion.

1974 – Dr. Henry Morgentaler is convicted of conspiracy to commit abortion and serves 10 months in jail. Dr. Morgentaler will continue to challenge Canadian laws for more than 30 years.

1988 – Canada's Supreme Court determines that the country's law against abortion is unconstitutional. Canada becomes one of just a few countries in the world without a law restricting abortion. Abortions are now governed under provincial and medical regulations like any other procedure.

1989 – Canada's Supreme Court rules that a man has no legal right to prevent a woman from having an abortion.

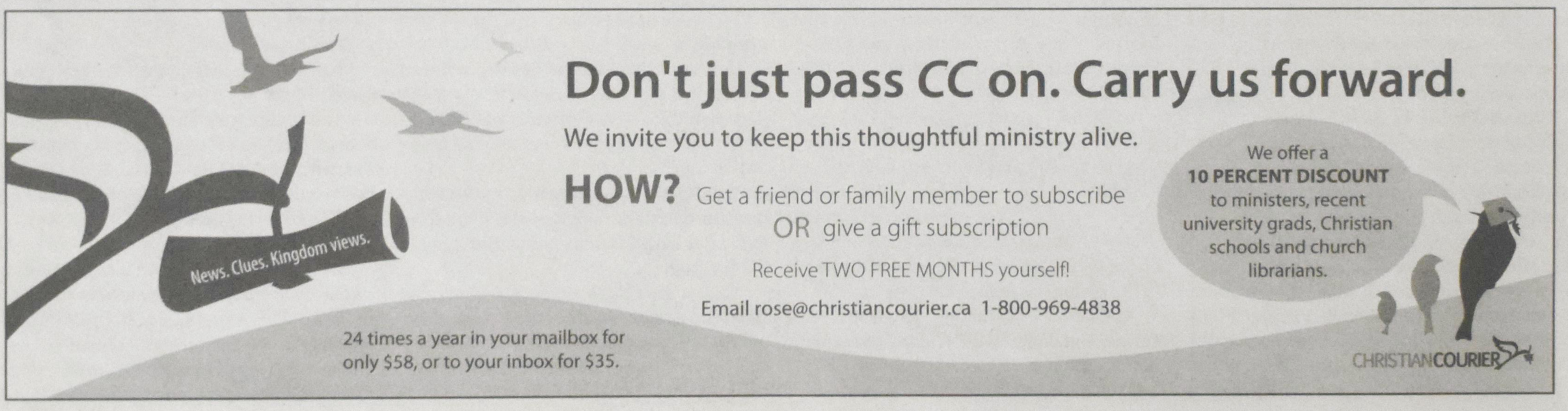
1991 – Bill C-43, an attempt by Canadian lawmakers to criminalise abortion is defeated by the Senate.

1998 – More than 110,000 abortions are performed in Canada.

2005 – The number of abortions in Canada drops to less than 98,000.

2010 – The Canadian Institute for Health Information reports that more than 64,000 abortions were performed in Canada in 2010, not including abortions performed in Quebec and at clinics in B.C.

crcjustice.org/life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Grietje (Grace) Sliekers-Dolfing

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John (†) (Anna) Morris – Milton, Ont.
Jane (Alan) O'Connor – Victoria, B.C.
Seven grandchildren and
10 great-grandchildren.

May God keep you in his loving care!

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hope to celebrate 60 years of marriage.

In His way, God blessed our marriage with three wonderful and (unique) children,
Karon (Peter)
David (with the Lord)
Jodi (Dave)
Our lives were also enriched with seven (plus three) grandchildren and last but not least, with three (plus one on the way) great-grandchildren. God has been so good!

After living in Agincourt and Burlington most of these years, we now reside at Holland Christian Homes where we have met up with many old friends and acquaintances.

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Please include a brief history of your work experience that you believe is appropriate for this position.

Applications for either the Worship Coordinator's position for 12 hours per week or the Music Director's position for 12 hours per week will also be accepted.

Obituaries

After giving her a joyful confidence in Jesus Christ, God, on November 11, 2012, called home my dear wife and our mother and oma,

DEE DEE VAN ANDEL (nee Dorenbos)
at the age of 75 years.

Previously widowed from Roger K. Treu.

She is survived by Andries (Andy) Van Andel, her loving husband for nearly 31 years, and by her children, Tim (Liz) Treu, Steve (Lisa) Treu and Linda Treu, all of the U.S.A. and her stepchildren Fred (Doris) Van Andel and Dineke (Bill) DeSnoo both of Canada, and eight dearly loved grandchildren.

Funeral Service was held on Nov.16, 2012 at Quinte Alliance Church, Belleville, followed by interment at the Belleville Cemetery.
If desired, memorial donations made to the Canadian Cancer Society will be appreciated by the family.

"So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God."
Isaiah 41:10a

Correspondence address:
480 Vermilyea Road
RR 5 Belleville ON K8N 4Z5

" For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor the powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8: 38-39

EDITH ZYLSTRA (nee Poot)

Edith battled an illness bravely and gracefully for 18 years. On December 27, 2012 with her family by her side went home to be with her Lord.

Edith was born in Holland in 1939 to Dirk and Johanna Poot. She immigrated to Canada with her family in 1952.

Survived by her loving husband Andrew Zylstra and her children – Margaret and Fred Olbach of St. Marys; Monica and Steve DeBoer of Wellburn; Theresa and Stan Nowek of Calgary; Sylvia Bell of Woodstock; Ron and Lizette Homan of Ingersoll; Andrea and Dave Molenhuis of Stratford; also survived by her step-children Michael Zylstra of Utterson; Phillip Zylstra of Millgrove; Raymond Zylstra of Bracebridge; Ben Zylstra of Aldershot and their spouses.

Loving sister to Nelly Nunes Vas; Jack and Erika Poot; Mary Ann and Abel Frankruyter; Joanne Wilkinson; Willie and Robert Andrews; Elly and Sye Vandermeer; Cora and Dale Davies; and in-laws Trudy Poot, Wilma and John Bakelaar and Peter and Eline Homan and Carla Homan.

Loving grandmother to 32 grandchildren and 19 great grandchildren.

Besides her parents, she was predeceased by brothers Richard Poot (1990); Gary Poot (1998); son-in-law Rick Bell (2011) and brother-in-law Lyall Wilkinson (2012).

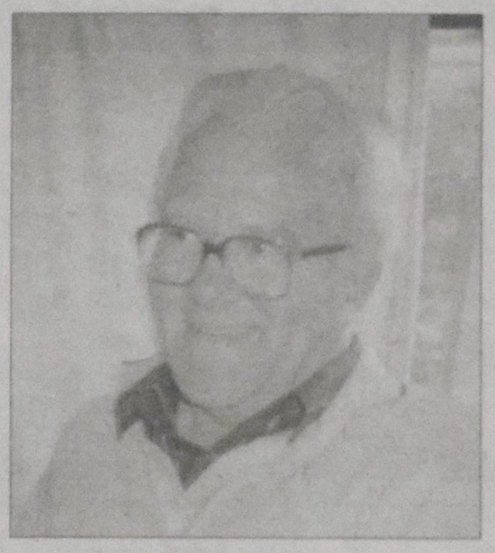
Edith lived her life serving and loving her family, but above all never wavered from her faith in her loving Saviour.

She was a member of the Christian Reformed Church of Ingersoll.

Donations in Edith's memory can be made to the Compassion Canada or charity of your choice.

Online condolences may be sent at www.gffh.ca

Earth has no sorrow that
Heaven cannot heal.



July 19, 1923 – Dec. 26, 2012

They shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
Isaiah 35:10

W. George Munnik

of Minto township
passed away peacefully at the Caressant Care Nursing Home, Harriston on Wednesday, Dec.26, 2012 in his 90th year.

Beloved husband of
Eleonora (Sprey) Munnik for 57 years.

Dear father of
Irma and John DeVries of Harriston,
Freda and Len Schellingerhoudt of Brantford,
Eric and Cecilia Munnik of Stoney Creek and
Roland and Holly Munnik of Uxbridge.

Grandfather of
Sarah, Joyce, Brian (Catherine), Teresa (Paul);
Bradley (Kim), David (Lindsey),
Christopher, Amanda;
Brandon, Kayla, Catrina and Michael.
Cherished by ten great-grandchildren.

Brother of
Cornelia Hofman, Elizabeth DeGoede
and Maria Munnik all of the Netherlands.
Remembered by nieces, nephews and friends.

Predeceased by four brothers
Jan, Henk, Han and Dirk, one sister Jeanne,
brothers-in-law Meindert DeGoede and Leen Hofman and sisters-in-law Ans, Bep and Mimi.

The service was held at the Palmerston Christian Reformed Church with Pastor Andrew de Gelder officiating.
Arrangements were entrusted to the Heritage Funeral Home, Palmerston.

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Jan 20 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster CRC at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Welkom

Feb 15-17 Marriage Encounter Weekend. Best Western Hotel & Conference Centre, St. Catharines. For information and to register, see reformedme.org.

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13 resolutions to improve the world's food supply in 2013

Nearly one billion people are still hungry and more than one billion others are overweight or obese. The need is for better access to better quality food.

Christian Science Monitor (CSM)

As we start 2013, many people will be thinking about plans and promises to improve their diet and health.

But we think a broader collection of farmers, policy-makers, and eaters need new, bigger resolutions for fixing the food system – real changes with long-term impacts in fields, boardrooms, and on plates all over the world.

Here are13 resolutions that the world can't afford to break.

Growing in cities: Food production doesn't only happen in fields or factories. Nearly 1 billion people worldwide produce food in cities. In Kibera, Kenya, the largest slum in Africa, farmers are growing seeds of indigenous vegetables and selling them to rural farmers. At Bell Book & Candle restaurant in New York, customers are served rosemary, cherry tomatoes, romaine, and other produce grown from the restaurant's aeroponic rooftop garden.

Creating better access: People's Grocery in Oakland, Calif., and Fresh Moves in Chicago bring mobile grocery stores to food deserts, giving low-income consumers opportunities to make healthy food choices. Instead of chips and soda, they provide customers with affordable organic produce, not typically available in their communities.

Eaters demanding healthier food: Food writer Michael Pollan advises not to eat anything that your grandparents wouldn't recognize. Try eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole foods without preservatives and other additives.

Cooking more: Home economics classes have declined in schools in the United Kingdom and the United States, and young people lack basic cooking skills. Top Chefs Jamie Oliver, Alice Waters, and Bill Telepan are working with schools to teach kids how to cook healthy, nutritious foods.

Creating conviviality: According to the Hartman Group, nearly half of all adults in the U.S. eat meals alone. Sharing a meal with family and friends can foster community and conversation. Recent studies suggest that children who eat meals with their families are typically happier and more stable than those who do not.

Focus on vegetables: Nearly 2 billion people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies worldwide, leading to poor development. The World Vegetable Center, however, is helping farmers grow high-value, nutrient-rich vegetables in Africa and Asia, improving health and increasing incomes.

Preventing waste: Roughly one-third of all food is wasted – in fields, during transport, in storage, and in homes. But there are easy, inexpensive ways to prevent waste. Initiatives like Love Food, Hate Waste offer consumers tips about portion control and recipes for leftovers, while farmers in Bolivia are using solar-powered driers to preserve foods.

Engaging youths: Making farming both intellectually and economically stimulating will help make the food system an attractive career option for youths. Across sub-Saharan Africa, cell phones and the internet are connecting farmers to information about weather and markets. In the U.S., Food Corps is teaching students how to grow and cook food, preparing them for a lifetime of healthy eating.

Protecting workers: Farm and food workers across the world are fighting for better pay and working conditions. In Zimbabwe, the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe protects labourers from abuse. In the U.S, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers successfully persuaded Trader Joe's and Chipotle to pay the premium of a penny-per-pound to Florida tomato pickers.

CHERYL RAVELO/REUTERS/FILE

Students eat during a supplemental feeding program at a day care center in Manila, the Philippines. The new year should mark new efforts to improve the quality of the world's food supply.

Acknowledging the importance of farmers: Farmers aren't just farmers, they're business-women and men, stewards of the land, and educators, sharing knowledge in their communities. Slow Food International works with farmers all over the world, helping recognize their importance to preserve biodiversity and culture.

Recognizing the role of governments: Nations must implement policies that give everyone access to safe, affordable, healthy food. In Ghana and Brazil, government action, including national school-feeding programs and increased support for sustainable agricultural production greatly reduced the number of hungry people.

Changing the metrics: Governments, NGOs, and funders have focused on increasing production and improving yields, rather than improving nutrition and protecting the environment. Changing the metrics, and focusing more on quality, will improve public and environmental health, and livelihoods.

Fixing the broken food system: Agriculture can be the solution to some of the world's most pressing challenges, including unemployment, obesity, and climate change. These innovations simply need more research, more investment and ultimately more funding.

Danielle Nierenberg and Ellen Gustafson are the co-founders of Food Tank: The Food Think Tank (www.FoodTank.org). Danielle is based in Chicago, Ill., and Ellen is based in San Diego, Calif.

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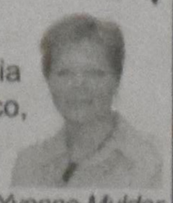
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News

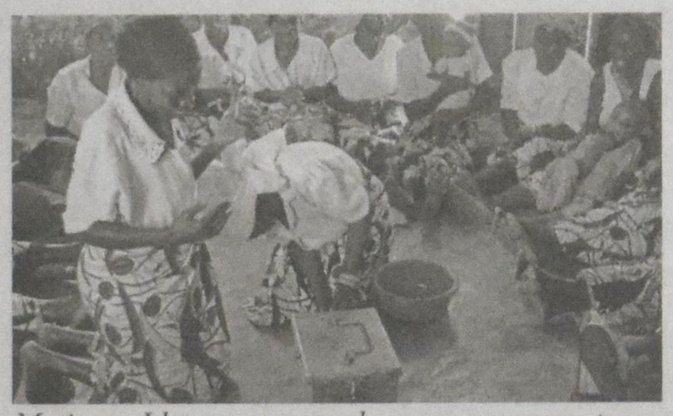
Something old, yet new

Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo

Can something like the Heidelberg Catechism that is 450 years old still have value or relevance for our world today? Precious metals like diamonds, gold and silver increase in their value over time. But what about creeds and confessions of the church? For a technologically immersed and post-millennial generation of today, does the HC really connect to daily life?

In my opinion, the HC espouses truths that are relevant for any age. One thing I appreciate the most about it is the wonderfully, systematic way it explains biblical principles that build and articulate a Christian's faith. It presents a worldview of answers to life's most basic questions, whether we live in the 16th century or the 21st century, such as: Who am I? Who is God? What is wrong with our world and caused its misery? What can address this problem? How should I live?

Another thing I appreciate most about the HC is how its questions and answers speak to our hearts searching for deep love, embrace and comfort. The HC explains



Mutiago: I have seen people overcome poverty when the truths of the HC were both taught and demonstrated. (Here: women in Malawi benefit from micro-loans).

the source for that comfort: belonging to Christ, experiencing his salvation from our sins and being assured of eternal life. At 13 years old, I first realized the joy of this comfort. Quoting HC #1 gave comfort when my mother died of cancer two years later, when my father died six days before my wedding, when my vehicle rolled over and when I lay flat on the floor during a shooting attack by cattle raiders in Africa.

In my work with CRWRC, now known as World Renew, it's been a joy to share this comfort through our training and community development programs. I have seen people overcome poverty when the truths of the HC were both taught and demonstrated; truths about God's justice and mercy, his providence and his Kingdom that intends all of Christ's lordship and renewal for all of life for all of the world.

Our challenge today with the HC is not to discern its relevancy but to share its truths in relevant ways. The methods may include training for community transformation, a rap song, a scrapbooking project, a conversation at Tim's or twitter. Whatever the approach, it's not how old a confession is that makes it relevant or not…it's what it says. And God's truth abides forever!

Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo is the Director of World Renew Canada. She lives in Hamilton with her family, and travels worldwide to oversee the work of World Renew.

In February, Faith Alive Resources will release an anniversary edition of the Catechism, an ecumenical Reformed and Presbyterian effort.

Why I (mostly) like the HCat

James C. Dekker

A few days ago I was talking with a close friend, Pastor Michael Borgert, about this brief article. "Hmmmm," he said. "Aside from Q&A 1, I don't like the Catechism all that much." Since he's a good friend and good friends should speak frankly to each other, I told him he was wrong.

Now, though, let me first say that I DON'T like Q&A 80. I'm pleased, though, that the CRC has sensitively dealt with that historical embarrassment. Most likely I would have committed that same flub if I had written HCat (so-called in my computer files). We can't change history, but we can and finally did apologize for our blunders.

After that bump, the road gets smoother. So, here's my list. HCat:

- is *doctrinally comprehensive*. It gives in 129 questions and answers a *clear organization of biblical doctrines* of creation, fall and redemption in its own tripartite "Sin-Salvation-Service" structure.
- provides *teachable doctrine* based in *biblical content*. While articulating theological doctrines, HCat often cites Old and New Testament events as historical bases.
- is, in language and tone, the most accessible Reformed confession I know – with the possible exception of the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Confession: "**What is the chief end of man?** Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."
- is *personal* in application, *communal* in foundation. Many questions begin, "What benefit is this teaching to me?" Still, HCat is not a "Jesus and Me" creed. It places persons in the community of God's people, the church.
- is *biblically balanced* and *respectful of church history*. It explores one foundational creed – The Apostles' – and two core Bible documents – the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.
- articulates those two documents with ethical directives that can, in divine grace and with fitting humility, produce people whose lives are submissive to God for his glory, our enjoyment of God and the common good.

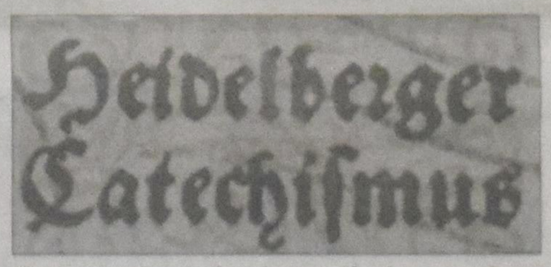
There! Six "likes" to one "wish it weren't there." Not a bad score for a human document based in inspired Scripture.

For 26 years in parish ministry, James C. Dekker has preached and taught, not infrequently with critical comments, all three "Forms of Unity," noting sadly that in too many instances, denominations that use them have split in bitter schisms.

Dekker: The HC is not a "Jesus and Me" creed. It places persons in community.

Why I (mostly) don't like the HC

Michael Borgert



Borgert: It is theologically lazy to lean uncritically on such an old document.

If you haven't put down the paper in disgust after reading the title, then you are at least open to hearing the other side of the story. It was only fair to allow my good friend, Jim Dekker, to go first in deference to his advancing age and impending retirement, and because he represents the (more or less) accepted view and mine is admittedly (but humbly) contrarian.

To be fair, though I (mostly) don't like the HC, I love Q&A 1. It is a rich summary of the Gospel. But the quality falls off dramatically after an initially very strong beginning (with the notable exceptions of Q&A 21, 32 and 91, among others). Admittedly, that's a big caveat. It's not so much that I don't ***like*** the HC; it's just that I don't have an uncritical infatuation with it. For the record, I don't have any significant theological quarrels with the HC. I can still sign the Form of Subscription, or the newly-adopted Covenant for Officebearers, in good conscience. The HC is helpful for teaching, though (in my opinion) not as helpful for preaching.

Recognizing the significant strength that is Q&A 1, here are some reasons I don't like the HC.

- The HC functions with an Anselmian theory of the atonement, which, while not a wrong or unhelpful understanding of the atonement, is incomplete. The HC could benefit from a more multi-faceted understanding of the atonement.
- It is questionable whether Ursinus and Olevianus ever intended to author a document that we would still be using – relatively unchanged – 450 years later.
- Our historical romanticism with regard to the HC has prevented us from taking the valuable core of the HC (and our other confessions) and bringing them forward into a new time and place to speak to the issues of our age, the way the HC spoke to the issues of its time.

In the end, in spite of its strengths, it is theologically lazy to lean so heavily and uncritically on the HC, as well as unfaithful to the generations to follow for us not to draft a new Reformed confession.

Mike Borgert is pastor of First Christian Reformed Church in Barrie, Ont.